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THE MOVIES COME FROM AMERICA

By

GILBERT SELDES

With a Preface by

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

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NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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1937

TO
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PREFACE

By CHARLIE CHAPLIN

I AM flattered by the request of my friend, Gilbert Seldes, to write a preface to his new book about the moving pictures. However, there is very little I can add to his knowledge.

Personally, I am more interested in the future of motion pictures than I am in their past. But the word "future," when made the subject of such objects as the League of Nations, economic determinism and taxation, is somewhat stupefying to contemplate these days, and especially the future of motion pictures, built as they are upon the shifting sands of popular entertainment. To-morrow may be television. Who knows? In the halcyon days of the so-called legitimate drama when the theatre was prosperously embarked, drifting on a sea of popularity, along came the storm of mechanical science (the movie and radio) and lo! the theatre found itself deposited upon the shores of neglect, an edifice of monumental dignity but considerably depleted from the wreck. To-day it serves as a hatchery from which plays and actors emerge for Hollywood consumption. Who would have thought that the theatre with all its tradition was destined to such a fate?

What is to be the fate of the motion-picture industry? At present, it is astride the world of success. From a Bowery nickelodeon it has passed through a metamorphosis to that of a Rockefeller music hall. Has it reached its zenith? Will it go farther? On the mechanical side it has made miraculous advances, but, artistically, it has yet many obstacles to overcome.

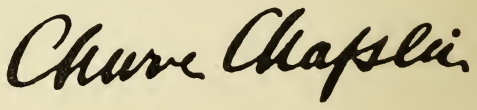
For instance, one of them is the matter of censorship. When the weekly periodicals, the daily Press, the novel and the theatre are free and unencumbered to comment frankly on current events, the film play is burdened with a specially imposed censorship which denies it the right to dwell on many of the issues of the day.

Under normal conditions of censorship, the film play with its fictional "boy meets girl" theme, has quite a task competing with the realism of the film news weekly with its assassination of a king, the tragic accident of a Zeppelin, its graphic accomplishments of a Lindbergh. But to-day, in this kaleidoscopic

turmoil of fast and furious events, when cause and effect with increasing pace are bringing to light a more realistic view on human affairs, the film play must ignore the vital issues and deal only in such subject-matter as a child would read in a rhyming book.

This condition was brought about by a recent crusade in the Press for purer films, and resulted in the industry creating a self-imposed censorship other than that within the national and state censor boards, the cry being that the film play so affects the minds and morals of young people that a more rigid censorship was necessary. Yet, on almost every other street corner, the daily Press features in glaring headlines that any child might read, crimes of violence, strikes and revolutions.

The problem of film censorship is difficult, and perhaps will never be solved to the satisfaction of all concerned. Nevertheless, if the element of aesthetic criticism were considered in censoring a film, it might result in a more adequate method of judging what is morally fit for the public. For many films that now pass the censors, if judged by their aesthetic standards, would be banned in their entirety because of their lack of good taste, their false standards of life and their vulgar treatment. On the other hand, many forbidden subjects, if judged by aesthetic standards, might be beneficial and constructive, if excelling in artistry, and treated with dignity and intelligence.



HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA
May 26, 1937

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WISH to acknowledge my debt to virtually every writer on the Movies; to Mr. Chaplin for his preface; to John Abbott and Iris Barry of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art of New York City; to Mr. Joseph Cornell for invaluable assistance in the collection of the illustrations; to the Walt Disney Studios for the drawing used as a frontispiece and on the wrapper; and to the producers of the thousands of moving pictures which have given me pleasure in the past twenty-five years.

G. S.

NEW YORK CITY
September 1937

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PARTICULAR thanks are due to Mr. Joseph Cornell, who has worked indefatigably on the collection of the illustrations, for the use of the sometimes unique subjects from his private collection reproduced on figs. 25, 28, 33, 35, 38, 40, 42, 46, 51, 56, 60, 61, 62, 68, 70, 82, 111, 116, 122 and 123, as to Mr. Merritt Crawford for figs. 19, 20, 119, Mr. Paul Gulick for fig. 71, and Mr. Theodore Huff for figs. 27 and 43. We are also deeply indebted to the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art of New York City, and to its librarian, Miss Iris Barry, for invaluable facilities for research and for the use of the subjects from its archives reproduced on figs. 1, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 53, 55, 69, 92, 108, 109, 110 and 112. For figs. 13, 96, 124, we are indebted to Mr. Cecil Beaton; for figs. 2, 59, to First National Pictures; for figs. 118, 120, to Gaumont-British; for figs. 3, 4, 5, 6, to the Keystone View Co.; for figs. 7. 9, 12, 45, 67, 78, 79, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 105, 106, 125, 130, to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; for fig. 117, to New World Pictures; for figs. 52, 58, to the New York Public Library; for figs. 41, 48, 49, 50, 66, 73, 81, 93, 101, 102, 133, to Paramount Pictures; for figs. 34, 54, to *Photoplay* Magazine; for figs. 74, 100, 131, to R.K.O. Pictures; for fig. 30, to Triangle Fine-Arts; for figs. 8, 10, 11, 29, 47, 72, 83, 103, 104, 121, 126, to Twentieth Century-Fox; for figs. 31, 32, 36, 37, 39, 44, 57, 63, 64, 76, 77, 107, 115, 127, 128, 132, to United Artists; for figs. 84, 114, to Universal; and for figs. 14, 75, 80, 129, to Warner Bros.

1 Picture-making about 1914: Mass-production in an unidentified studio

2 Picture-making in 1936. James Cagney in *Great Guy*

CHINESE
GRAND HOTEL

Foreword

This book deals for the most part with moving pictures made in America. There was a time when this geographical limitation would be quite serious, and there may be such a time again. At the moment, however, production of moving pictures outside the United States seems to me to be divided into two classes:

First, pictures made under the direct control of governments for purposes of propaganda, and

Second, pictures made for competition with American pictures in the world market.

The magnificent experiments made in the early days of the Soviet cinema are sufficient proof that propaganda pictures can carry the art of the moving picture a long way. As explained later in this book, the Russian directors reverted to first principles, largely the first American principles, and on this basis made some important technical discoveries. Nevertheless the movie made in Hollywood remains the dominant form.

The chief competitor in the American field of the straight commercial movie is England. Since the dialogue film was invented, the English-speaking nations can judge the skill and inventiveness of foreigners by the export, not of completed films, but of film makers—story writers, players and, above all, directors. The number has been small. The names of Korda and René Clair instantly come to mind and then one hesitates —and the foreign picture is lost.

As between the English and American film the situation changes from month to month, but the general line of development is fairly clear. Picture-making in Hollywood has always had an international flavour, beginning with the silent days when the exchanges between nation and nation were much easier. Picture-making in England, which began by being fairly insular, has now definitely become Anglo-American, with almost wholesale importations of directors and story writers trained in Hollywood, and, on the other hand, a much greater degree of success in the American market. Nevertheless the

British film seems always trying to be as American as possible without being definitely un- or anti-British. In 1931 an English critic of the films, Miss C. A. Lejeune, wrote a book called *Cinema* and intentionally omitted discussion of the British industry and the British craftsmen from its text. There were a few words about them in the preface, but the industry as a whole seemed to this judicious author not to merit discussion in a book which dealt only with significant people and movements. In the six years which have elapsed, the situation has changed. Mr. Korda's *Henry VIII* and *The Ghost Goes West* (directed in England by René Clair) have been remarkably well received on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is easy to foresee the time when one will not be able to say with any assurance whether a picture was made in Hollywood or at Denham. That will be almost entirely because the product of Denham has been assimilated to the product of Hollywood, and not because Hollywood has adopted many of the methods of Denham.

Some time ago I read that a new studio was being opened in England and that it was hoped that this studio would turn out English pictures and would show Hollywood how good pictures could be made. In its physical equipment this studio used all of the latest machinery developed in America and elsewhere, but its soul was to be everything that Hollywood is not; it was not to suggest Hollywood in the slightest degree—and they named it Pinewood! It recalled the famous story of the producer who called in his men and announced that they were to make an African adventure picture, by all odds the greatest ever conceived, but it was not to imitate *Trader Horn*, it was not to suggest *Trader Horn* in the slightest degree. "And now," he said, "the first thing to decide is a name for the picture. What shall we call it, *Trader what*?"

This book is written by an American who has seen more pictures than most people and therefore has suffered more than most from the stupidities and monotony, the uninventiveness and the timidity of American pictures; nothing could be more pleasing to him than the thou owerful rival to Hollywood which would go where d led only when Hollywood led in the right direction, ould avoid its banalities—even if it substituted some of its own. It is with considerable regret that I record a setback to these hopes.

I have seen three types of films made in England: the imaginative film drawn from the works of H. G. Wells; the

4 Movies for the Millions: Glasgow

5, 6 Movies for the Millions: New York City

spectacular historical film; and the comedy drama with which various names are associated. All of these have specific virtues. The ideas which Mr. Wells supplied are fundamentally more respectable, as ideas, than those of the average Hollywood film. In the historical pictures I have a feeling that characters are treated with a little more regard for historical verity than they are in Hollywood; and in the comedies there is a quiet fund of humour which contrasts with the more brittle wit of Hollywood. Yet all of these qualities seem to be bought at a high price—the one price which the movies cannot pay. Again and again these movies stop moving. Even those made by American directors fall under the spell. In their good parts they recall Hollywood, and in their bad they prove that Hollywood is right.

I think that this is a natural fault of an inexperienced system of production. As time goes on, the films of England should be able to conserve the virtues I have mentioned and many others without sacrificing the only life of the movie. I have suggested elsewhere in this book that there is a field in which British producers may teach America a lesson—but it is not a field of great profit. Obviously, if they want great profit, they are not going to abandon the eighteen thousand motion-picture theatres in the United States with their eighty million attendance every week. The pressure of these rolling zeros is bound to be felt, and British production will continue to make concessions to American taste.

Somebody ought to point out to the British producers before they become as successful and as obstinate as the American producers are, that people *will* go to see intelligently made moving pictures—but the pictures have to move. The success of the American movies is due to many separate circumstances —some of which are canvassed in this book. But all of them put together could not have made the American movie so dominant if it were not for two things: the moving picture corresponds to something fundamental in American life—America has always been *on the move* and has *kept moving*, its history, as an Englishman divined, is a history of transportation;[1] the second thing is that the people who made the movies profoundly believe in them and thoroughly enjoy them. Once in a while Hollywood protests that it would like to do better things but that it must give the people what people want.

[1] Philip Guedalla in *The Hundred Years.*

And then Hollywood dashes over to the nearest projection-room and enjoys the movies it is making. That candid pleasure in the work produced, that sincere belief that it is good, added to the instinctive feeling for the essence of the movie as movement, has probably done more for Hollywood than all that good intentions and high purposes and subtle aesthetics could ever do.

1

WRITING about the moving picture is one of the least rewarding jobs in the world. I have done it for more than twenty years, at various times, and I can honestly say that the only pleasure it has given me has been this: that I have had to remember the movies about which I wrote. It is comparatively easy to convey to a reader some idea of the quality of a book—you can tell the plot or quote a paragraph; it is possible with good illustrations to take a reader with you as you discuss painting or sculpture. But the moving picture, like music, cannot be quoted or illustrated on the printed page. The publisher of this book may be irritated by my saying so, but I hasten to soothe him. The collection of pictures to which this text is an accompaniment is the best instigator of memory. Even if the reader has never seen the particular movie from which a photograph is reproduced here, his familiarity with movies in general will start up in his mind the action of which the illustrations are a part. Just as in practice a book about music reproduces a few bars to illustrate a melody or a bit of counterpoint, which you can take to the piano and finger out if you do not read music easily, so the pictures in this book will recall to you things seen.

Ideally a book about music should be accompanied by phonograph records and a book about movies by film and projector. As that is not possible, writers must try to convey the effect of music or the effect of the movies to their readers. If a man existed who had never heard a song in his life, the syllables "ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" would mean nothing to him; those who remember the song would sing it to themselves; and a person who knew what song was, but had never heard this particular song, would still know that they represented a melody of some sort. To give the sense of the movie is actually a little bit easier because in a moving picture there are palpable and familiar things: chairs and tables and motor-cars and rivers and trees and, above all, human beings, usually engaged in a story which can be easily retold. But all of these things miss the essential: the one thing which no written word can reproduce is the movement itself.

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Why, then, write about the movies at all? Possibly my own experience is as good an answer as any. While I have had little satisfaction in writing about the pictures, I have read everything written about them on which I could lay my hands, from the drivel of the fan magazine, through the serious consideration of the movie as a social phenomenon and a work of art, up to discussions based on the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas. After thirty-five years of seeing movies, I find myself going to them with greater confidence than ever and coming away from them—sometimes—with greater pleasure than ever. I am perhaps a little more selective than I used to be, but unless I know that all the pictures playing in my neighbourhood are revoltingly bad, I would rather take a chance on a second-rate movie than see none at all. This is an uncritical and even unintelligent attitude; and if I may anticipate one of the few general points I intend to make in this book, it is upon this attitude that the financial success of the movies is founded. And although I find that the magazines which tell about the private lives of the stars are becoming too stupid and the magazines of movie aesthetics too rarefied, I still read about the movies with pleasure, because reading about them brings them to my mind.

Yet I think that one kind of book about the movies has not yet been written—a practical guide for the movie patron, a book which in the long run might save the movie-goer some money and at the same time increase his pleasure. I am afraid the book which I am writing will not completely achieve these ends, but I hope it is pointed in the right direction. A book about contemporary novelists can say to the reader that Mr. A writes sentimental tosh in a dull way, and if the reader accepted this judgment, he would save money by not buying the works of Mr. A; as for the works of Miss B, the critic might say that although she seems to be writing bright comic narratives, her works when properly understood form a criticism of modern society. The reader, discovering this judgment to be true, would thereafter have more pleasure in the works of Miss B. There are very few such definite judgments to be made about the moving pictures, and one reason is that the A's and B's of the movies represent dozens of individuals. I can say with absolute confidence that any picture made by Walt Disney is worth seeing, his rare failures being more attractive than the successes of most others; I can say the same about Charlie

Chaplin. And the reason is that these two artists either create or closely control the creation of their own work. But the moment a director shows signs of genius, the moment he stamps his personality on a film, he is hired by another producer who may present to him a dull story and an actress whose failing powers of attraction the producer hopes to counteract through the skill of the director. A new star may be superb, but after two or three pictures may be compelled by director and producer to repeat a set of tricks instead of creating new characters. Writers of plots and dialogue may be fresh and bright on one subject and dull on another. Moreover, the name of the producing company is no guarantee, because virtually all of the companies try to make all sorts of films; it is shocking but true that most of them deliberately make second-rate films in order to round out their production schedules. The best one can do is to provide a few guiding lines. The material out of which movies are made is too fluid for much rigid classification.

I should like it very much if you, the readers of this book, would occasionally get very angry at the producers of moving pictures, because *you, and millions of men and women like you, have spent billions of dollars on the movies*! We read that Colossal Pictures spent three million dollars on its new supercolossal feature and it does not occur to us that in the long run Colossal Pictures has spent *our* three million dollars. To be sure, if this new feature is a failure, Colossal will show a deficit; but Colossal has already abstracted from our pockets the money it invested. Has Colossal given good value in return for our money? Sometimes it has and sometimes it has not. We have paid at the box office to see Colossal pictures with no assurance that they were good. Colossal has profited by our habit of going to the movies (a habit created over a period of twenty-five years, during which Colossal itself may have done very little for us).

The moment we remember that *our* money has made the pictures, we will feel more justified in objecting if a picture turns out dull or offensive. The producers of the movies do not recognize our direct contribution to their finances. They want us to come into the theatre, but they are not as subservient as politicians. Notice that they "present" and sometimes even "proudly present" their pictures to us—lordly gifts which it would be ungracious for us to criticize. They tell us of the assiduous labours through which they have gone to get the best

of everything; they do not tell us that *we have paid for the best of everything plus the producers' profit.* But we have paid, and so long as supremely fine moving pictures continue to be made we shall go on paying, not only for them but for the appalling lot of second and third-rate pictures which in effect take money from our pockets and give us shoddy goods in return. That is the reason why the reader who is the ultimate investor in the movies ought to get angry once in a while.

Except for those pictures made under governmental order as instruments of propaganda and a few others made by amateurs, moving pictures are produced to make money. Motor-cars and safety razors are produced for the same reason, but we have some protection against producers who try to sell us cars or razors which do not do the work for which they are intended. We have no protection against the moving-picture producer—and one reason is that we do not really know what the moving picture is intended for. Or, in other words—although the words sound surprising—*we do not know why we go to the movies.* The minute we do know, we will be able to get more out of the movies.

There have been some excellent attempts made to explain the passion of the people for the movies; these explanations have been grounded in psychology or aesthetics or economics. Each of these has contributed something of value; but omitting them all, I think that it is possible to establish one fairly definite rule: we do *not* go to the movies for *any* of the reasons which the producers of the movies consider fundamental. We do *not* go primarily for the stories the pictures tell; we do *not* go to see the great stars which publicity has imposed upon the pictures; we do *not* go for the lavish clothes in which stars are dressed; we do *not* go because the stars, male and female, have sex appeal. Once in a great while a moving-picture producer reaches into the air and plucks the idea that people go to the movies "to be taken out of themselves"; there are a dozen other ways of escaping from our own perplexities so that this alone does not explain the overwhelming attraction of the moving picture as compared with any other form of escape.

It is natural for the producers of the movies to emphasize the millions they spend, the stars they hire, the stories for which they pay great sums and all the other supposed attractions of their products. These are the special stock in trade of the producer to-day. Sheer pride would make it impossible for

9 *Ben Hur*, directed by Fred Niblo, 1926: The Chariot Race

10 *Seventh Heaven*, directed by Frank Borzage, 1927: Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell

any contemporary producer to admit that *people go to the moving picture to-day for precisely the same reason that they went nearly forty years ago.* They went then because the moving picture moved. They go now because the moving picture moves. The only reservation that has to be made is this: if the moving picture had not learned how to tell a story, it might have vanished except in the form of the newsreel and the historical record. But this does not mean that the story is the essence of the moving picture; the essence is still the way the story is told, which is by movement, and this remains just as true to-day as it was in the time of the silent pictures.

And another thing which no producer really cares to emphasize is that we go to the movies simply to be at the movies. To leave one's home, to enter a place designed for entertainment, to experience the sort of contagious pleasure which several hundred other people feel at the same time—all of these things used to be the privilege of a comparatively small number of people. There are indeed moving-picture palaces whose prices are higher than the cheapest seats of the theatre, but the moving picture creates theatres where none had ever existed; it breaks the monopoly of the "theatre district" (Broadway or the Loop or the West End) and it breaks down the domination of the metropolis. The movie is *mass entertainment*—and *both* these words are important because the feeling that a large crowd is sharing one's experience is cherished by almost all human beings. A comic movie is funnier, a tearful one draws more tears, if it is seen in a large company. The mad King of Bavaria liked to have productions of grand opera at which he was the only spectator; that was part of his madness. Sane people enjoy the presence of their fellow-beings. So we must write down that people go to the movies for a kind of physical pleasure which is not directly connected with the quality of the movies themselves.

Once we know why we go to the movies we shall be able to make more definite our demands for the movies we like and to get more pleasure out of those we see. I made a little comparison between moving pictures and motor-cars; obviously there is a great publicity behind both of them. Back of the motor car lies a practical necessity and back of the moving picture lies an instinct for pleasure. Motor-cars, like moving pictures, are sold by appealing to many separate desires: elegance, comfort and a good position in society are guaranteed

as often by manufacturers of cars as the number of miles the cars will go per gallon. Yet the cars do have to go, whereas a moving picture may be advertised to us because in it a handsome man and the greatest soprano of our time are shown as happy lovers who adopt a child prodigy. Such a picture may not *go* at all in the sense that the motor-car goes; it may lack all of the actual fundamentals of a moving picture or have them only in a slight degree—as if a motor-car could run fifty yards in twenty minutes and then would stop for half an hour. The handsome youth, the famous singer, the publicized prodigy would be surrounded by other elements, wonderful clothes for instance, or novel settings; they might impersonate characters in history to whom sentiment attached great importance; a trifling scandal about their private lives might be circulated at the time and make them temporarily interesting; they might, with luck, sing a song which became so popular that although people heard it thousands of times, they would still want to see the picture in which it originally was sung.

It is perfectly clear that all of these things I have just listed do attract people to specific moving pictures. I am sure that a thousand people went to see Shirley Temple because she was "cute" for every hundred who went because she was, at least in her early pictures, quite a remarkable actress. Not to acknowledge this is to be both a fanatic and a fool, but to think that these are really the elements which bring people to the moving pictures is to be invincibly ignorant, because the obvious fact is that people go to the movies when none of these things are present; they go to the movies about which they know nothing. They go to the movies because they simply and passionately want to go to the movies.

And most of the time they assume that what they see on the screen is the best that they can hope for. It is often so good, it is so much better than most other forms of relaxation or entertainment available to them, that their satisfaction is justified. But the truth is that moving pictures are made by a great variety of men, some intelligent, some ignorant, some with the desire to make good money no matter how contemptible their product may be, some with the desire to make good pictures and to make good money, nearly all of them gathered in one or two places, with no great knowledge of the people in the world around them, most of them encased in their wealth and prestige, intimidated by the investment of money they have made and

11 *Cavalcade*, directed by Frank Lloyd, 1933

12 *The Great Ziegfeld*, 1936

terrified by the prospect of failure. They—producers, players, directors and writers—live a large part of their lives in the atmosphere which publicity has created for them; they begin to believe what their press agents have invented.

Moreover, the moving picture, since it is a product of human beings, is a developing organism. What we see to-day was not created out of the void last month; the process of creation began years ago. Inventors, financiers, real estate operators, newspaper proprietors, politicians, clergymen—they have had as much effect on the moving pictures we see to-day as the directors and players and writers who made this week's new feature picture. The best of the present creators profit by the experience and avoid the errors of the past; the others merely repeat the errors. That is why it is necessary to recall the history of the moving picture before we can understand why we get what we get on the screen and are so hard put to it to get anything else.

2

If the entire population of the British Isles went to see a moving picture on Monday and then vanished from the earth, and another population equally great went on Tuesday, and another on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, together they would roughly equal the number of people all over the world who actually do see the movies in the course of a week. In eight weeks the moving-picture audiences equal in number the total population of the globe. Assuming that the average programme consists of a feature picture, a newsreel, and one or two brief items, the total amount of time spent in watching the screen each week is half a billion hours; if every man, woman and child who went to the movies could spend the time making motor-cars, they would produce in an up-to-date American factory some five million motor-cars a week, thirty billion dollars' worth a year. Instead they go to the movies. They spend more time going to the movies than they do on anything else after their basic human needs and appetites have been satisfied. They go to the movies often because those needs and appetites are not completely satisfied. There are times when going to the movies seems to be the one great universal impulse of all humanity.

You would think that since this is so, the moving picture would be the first concern of statesmen, philosophers and artists all over the world. Once in a long time you can see evidences of such interest. At the very beginning, a few Frenchmen thought they saw great possibilities in the cinema, and the actors of the *Comédie française* allowed themselves to be photographed. Tolstoy foresaw that a whole new method of expression was opened to the artist; D'Annunzio wrote the scenario for a patriotic Italian film in 1912; and Lenin, when he came to power in Russia, said: "In my opinion the art of the cinematograph is of all the arts the most important for Russia." During the World War, every government recognized the moving picture as a prime instrument of propaganda. But that the moving picture absorbs the interest of human beings all over the world, that it profoundly affects the thoughts and

emotions and habits of whole nations, and that going to the movies has become almost as common as having breakfast—these things have only begun to be understood by statesmen who rule the destinies of nations and by the philosophers and artists who are supposed to express and elevate the spirit of mankind.

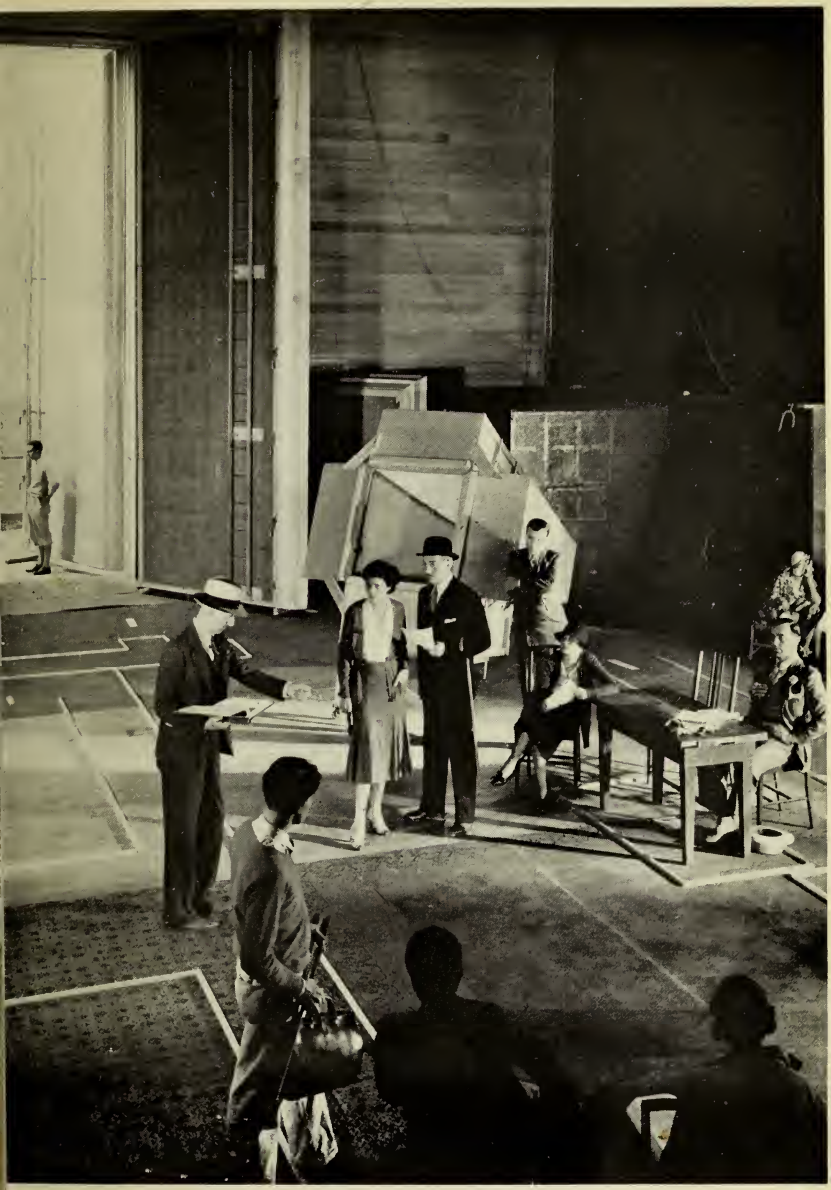
I have used the phrase "going to the movies," the American equivalent of the universal expression in which the word "movies" may be displaced by "cinema," "kino," "films" or "pictures." I use that phrase because I am sure that it is the magic formula upon which the success of the moving picture as an industry is based, and it is almost superfluous to say that hardly any producer of motion pictures in Hollywood, Elstree, Rome or Berlin is at all aware of this essential factor. The producers spend vast sums of money to attract people to see this or that star, or a film based on a popular book or on a great classic or on the life of a national hero; and it is perfectly true that people will say "There is a Garbo picture playing to-night; let us go to see it." Or they may say: "I want to see that film about Robespierre or Nero"; or they "cannot wait" for the next Chaplin or Marx Brothers picture. But these are the refinements; the fundamental passion is a desire to go to the movies, which means to go to any movie rather than not go at all. You do not decide to go to a concert or to the theatre in anything like the same frame of mind; you carefully scrutinize the lists and see who is playing, and playing what; but you plan to go to the movies and invite friends to go to the movies with you, and although you may be selective and choose between two or three offerings, you do eventually go to the movies, taking your chance.

In a limited way parallels exist. There are people who go to a circulating library and ask for a mystery story; a small number of people go to the opera or to the ballet regardless of the programme offered; enthusiasts for Gilbert and Sullivan may prefer *Iolanthe*, but are happy if any of the operettas are presented; the American sport fan will go to any baseball game, the English to any football match, the Spanish to any bullfight, with a reasonable confidence that he will be satisfied. But all of these put together and multiplied a hundredfold would not begin to approach the number of those who automatically go to the movies. Make an exception of the theatres of the West End in London, the Loop in Chicago, Longacre Square in New

York, the Boulevards of Paris, and the corresponding sections in other large cities; that is where the publicity originates and into them are drawn without doubt a much higher percentage of patrons who want to see a particular star or a specific picture. But the seventy thousand theatres in which movies are shown in the world are not chiefly the grandiose palaces of Megalopolis. They are neighbourhood houses, converted halls in provincial towns and villages, and they are patronized not by people who are interested in exceptional pictures and enchanted by the great stars, but by people who pay considerably over a billion dollars a year because they want "to go to the movies."

This is the prime phenomenon of our time. The radio can reach more people at any given moment, but one does not pay every time the radio is turned on, one does not leave home to go to an auditorium to listen to what the radio may bring. Never before in the history of the world has there been an actually universal entertainment. Possibly the gladiatorial combats and the massacres of the Christians in ancient Rome were intended to satisfy all the people of a metropolis at the same time; but no attempt was ever made before the movies began, to please young and old, men and women, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, well-bred and vulgar, urban and provincial, cleric and peasant, by the same means. Everything that is strong and everything that is weak in the moving pictures must have its source in this same attempt at being universal—its wealth in money, its poverty in taste, its splendid achievements, and its disastrous failures.

All the other arts were aristocratic in their beginnings. Books were written for the few who could read; music composed for court circles; paintings and sculptures made for patrons. And only the church, which used all of these arts to a certain extent, and architecture and stained glass in the highest degree, did anything to save the arts from becoming exclusively the pleasure of a very few. As the middle class rose to power, it beautified its cities with town halls and celebrated its history with equestrian statues or mural paintings, borrowing the arts upon which the aristocracy had set their approval. Even the art of writing was originally practised for the advantage of the small number who could read, and reading is still far from being a universal habit which the movies, radio and television may presently destroy. There was a period during which reading might have become something more than



13 John Cromwell rehearsing Kay Francis in *The Vice Squad*

14 A three-storey set for *Call It A Day*, 1937

a luxury for the few; the average man was beginning to feel he had to read in order to know what was going on in the world, to follow events which touched his own life, and to get more satisfaction out of living. Between the radio giving him the news and the moving picture condensing and dramatizing novels, the necessity for reading steadily diminishes. When they coalesce in television and make the average man a spectator of world events wherever they occur, and at the same time afford him an entertainment with such luxury as ancient despots could hardly imagine, the private art of reading may disappear before the new universal art. In the composite of television, the moving picture will have the greater share.

3

It will have the greater share because the things we see impress us more than the things we hear, and of the things we see, those that move are most impressive of all. The essential in the moving picture is not the picture, but the movement; just as it is not the water, but the movement of the water which creates the special character of the waterfall. Simple and obvious this principle may be, but it is frequently forgotten, and often the movies which fail to move are called great art. Avoiding aesthetics and psychology both, we can find the proof of the principle in the very beginnings of the moving picture. It hardly matters at what point in the past one starts; the effort of the old pioneers was always to create movement, and one of the most effective rose out of a strange research into the movement of a running horse. The question was whether a horse at a gallop ever actually takes all four feet off the ground at the same time. There was a piratically rich governor of the State of California who bet that the horse did, and to win his bet he invested forty thousand dollars in a battery of twenty-four cameras standing in a row, each one foot from the other, so that they could take a series of successive photographs. He won his bet, and long after he was dead the moving-picture industry returned to California and paid incalculable dividends on his investment.[1]

The question of what a horse looked like when he galloped was of practical interest to painters of battlepieces, and Meissonier got hold of the pictures which Edward Muybridge, the photographer, had made in California, turned them into transparencies and, using a sort of magic lantern for projecting, created a kind of elementary cinematograph. Then it seemed that dozens of people were simultaneously beginning to invent the moving picture. A French astronomer wanted to record the transit of planets—another study in movement—and a physicist, working with him, had the idea of taking all the pictures with one camera. Muybridge called on Thomas A.

[1] Terry Ramsaye's *Million and One Nights* is an invaluable repository of fact and legend regarding the early movies.

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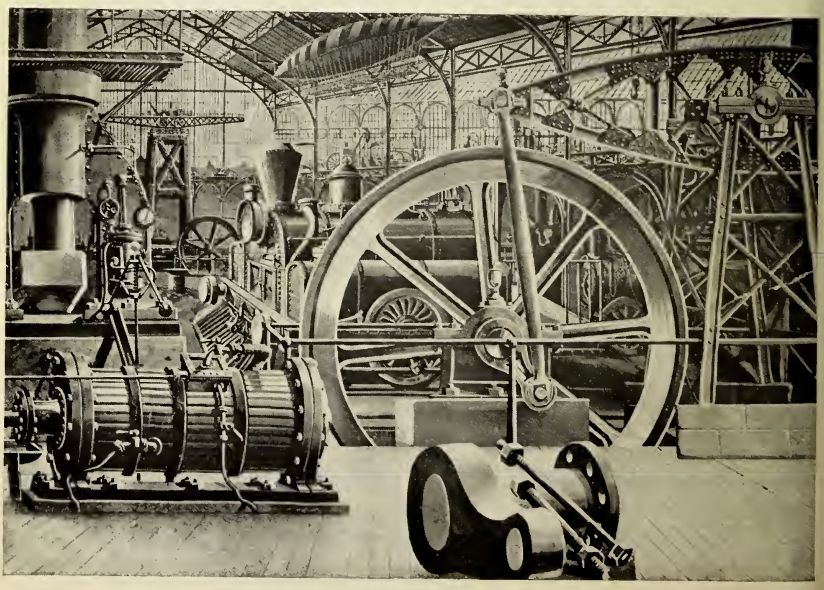
15 The Black Maria in which early Edison films were taken

16 The Edison Kinetophone: a Combination of Sound and Movie in 1912

17 The first Cinematographic Studio, built by Georges Méliès at Montreuil, France



18 Set for *Voyage à Travers l'Impossible*, by Georges Méliès, *ca.* 1904

Edison, and at almost the same time a young Englishman, working in Edison's laboratories, conceived the idea of a camera with film on a cylinder—Edison was interested because he thought that pictures would be an interesting addition to the talking machine. Meanwhile manufacturers of cameras were developing rolls of film to take the place of the comparatively slow and unwieldy glass plates, and in France, again, Georges Méliès, who operated a little theatre of magic, foresaw a new way to entertain the multitude.

At this point the history of the moving picture runs into an international snag—the question of priority. It is probably true that not one in a million patrons of the movies has the faintest interest in knowing who first showed a movie to an audience. Actually the honour seems to belong to the brothers Lumière who gave a demonstration before members of a *private* society in 1895; the picture showed the Lumière workmen leaving the factory. On the twentieth of May of that year a moving picture was shown on a screen in New York City before a *paying* audience. It was not a picture of an actual event, but of a prize fight expressly made for the purpose. The first presentation of moving pictures to a paying audience in France took place later in 1895.

The history of this French showing is a little compendium of the history of the movies. In the basement of the Grand Café there was a small auditorium which the proprietor was in the habit of renting out for various purposes, retaining as his share twenty per cent of the receipts. He had no faith in the enterprising gentleman who proposed to charge a franc for half an hour's entertainment, during which the spectators would see some twelve films, each lasting no more than three minutes. He refused to accept the usual tariff and demanded a fixed sum of thirty francs a day for the rental of his hall. On the first day thirty-five individuals each paid one franc, and the proprietor was gratified by his own shrewdness. Three weeks later the little hall was taking two thousand francs a day.

Some forty years later the same kind of moving picture theatre was established and was also successful. In that little French hall were shown what we now call documentary films. The arrival of a train, a city street, people swimming, and similar bits. The first success of the movies was based almost entirely on the pleasure of recognition. A newspaper praised the scene at the seashore because the picture of the sea was "so true."

The idea that the camera could be used to create fictions—the great lies which Plato would call poetry—had not occurred.

It would be a little cruel to write the early history of the moving picture under the title: *The Mistakes of Edison*—particularly as a great many people are still making the same mistakes. But it is worth pointing out that the principal inventor of the moving picture as we know it had in mind the creation of something entirely different. Even after he had seen a moving picture, Edison considered that his inventions were useful because they could make "photographic reproduction of an opera or play." Moreover, Edison never was reconciled to the idea of projecting the movies on a screen. He had at that time the phonograph with ear tubes, and he used moving-picture film in connection with these phonographs in penny-in-the-slot machines. He was afraid that a picture on a screen, visible to hundreds of people at one time, would too rapidly exhaust its potential audience.[1] The moving picture had to be taken away from the inventors by aggressive and ignorant men without taste or tradition, but with a highly developed sense of business, before it could be transformed from a mechanical toy into the medium of the first popular art.

The brothers Lumière, for instance, advised Georges Méliès that the moving picture "might perhaps be exploited for a while as a scientific curiosity, but it had no commercial future." Méliès wanted to buy the invention for making magic on the screen, and although the Lumière brothers refused to sell, Méliès became very important in moving-picture history. He did make magic; while nearly everybody else in the movies was trying to photograph something real, Méliès was creating illusions; he loved the tricks of the camera; he made inanimate objects move. One day when he was taking an out-of-door scene, the camera broke down for a moment. When Méliès developed the film, the omnibus which he had been photographing just before the break was suddenly transformed into a hearse, and Méliès profited by the accident to create deliberate metamorphoses for the purposes of comedy. He produced fairy tales, he set human beings walking on the ceiling, he

[1] A similar error was made by the early engineers working on radio broadcasting. They thought that it would be an excellent system for the secret transmission of spoken messages, superior to the telephone because there was no need for a central office—and the very idea inherent in the name 'broadcasting' had not occurred to them.

19 Early Biograph Picture, *ca.* 1897

20 Early Biograph Picture, before 1900

21 A Scene from *Cripple Creek Bar-room*, made by Edison in 1898

22 A Scene from *Wash Day Troubles*, directed by Edmund Kuhn in 1895

3 A Scene from the May Irwin–John C. Rice Kiss, made in 1896

4 A Scene from *Tatters: a Tale of the Slums*, produced *ca.* 1907–8 by Cricks and Martin, London

25 Studio Film-making, *ca.* 1914: Irene Castle in *Vengeance is Mine*

26 Street Film-making, 1914: Theda Bara in *A Fool There Was.* Note the interested crowd

planted an umbrella on the moon and it became a giant mushroom. The French called him the Jules Verne of the screen and properly consider him a forerunner of Walt Disney. Practically he was very influential because he persuaded all the manufacturers to use the same system of perforation so that any film could be shown through any projector, and it is said that quite by accident he invented the fade-out.

There is no room in this little book for an extended history of the movies. The pioneer days when the twentieth century began have infinite charm, and all those who invented and elaborated at that time are entitled to our gratitude, but we can only touch the high spots of the story and particularly touch those which had some bearing on the present state of the movies. The reader will note that three kinds of moving pictures have been mentioned already: the movie which is a newsreel; the trick fantasy movie; and the movie of a staged counterpart or reproduction of a real event (the "prize fight" in the first American showing). The documentary film remained one of the great social values of the moving picture, and within the past five years small movie-houses devoted entirely to these films have been established; but the newsreel has not been the first interest of the moving-picture programme; the film of magic has turned into the cartoon comedy and all the other forms of magic have been virtually abandoned; the moving picture has become to all intents and purposes a new medium of fiction, and this fiction is largely realistic; even when it is most romantic and untrue to life it pretends to be the truth itself. The faked prize fight of the first American commercial film foretold the path which the movies would take.

The magic lantern was a familiar toy at this time, and there were several ways in which one picture it cast on the screen could be transformed into another. One method was to have two pictures side by side on one strip of glass and to shift so rapidly from one to the other that there was almost a sense of movement. Another definitely anticipated the "dissolve" of the actual movies. A wintry scene slowly melted away and blossoms were visible on the trees. This method was particularly favoured as an accompaniment to sentimental ballads. A sufficient number of slides, carefully arranged, could actually illustrate the development of a story, and such sequences were in fact produced by Alexander Black who justifiably asserts that he invented the photoplay in this way before the moving

picture had arrived at the point of telling a story. The difference between the two things is perfectly clear because the series of slides remains a set of *illustrations* for a story, whereas in proper movies *the movement tells the story*. It was hard to make this distinction clear even to some of the people working with the motion camera. Mr. Terry Ramsaye tells a story of a director who was faking a version of the *Passion Play of Oberammergau* and who could not get out of his head the idea that he was making lantern slides, so that at every important moment he would rush before the camera and cry: "Hold it!" immobilizing the players and destroying the essence of the film.

But the moving picture was moving ahead, proceeding by steps as jerky and galvanic as its own movements on the screen. Within a year after the first movies were shown, a highbrow editor was denouncing them for their vulgarity and calling for the intervention of the police. What he had seen was a close-up of a kiss which ran fifty feet, a matter of three seconds. Within a year, also, the first of a seemingly endless series of lawsuits involving priority of patents began.

This litigation is of no importance whatever in itself, but it had a profound effect on the quality of moving pictures. The major companies licensed under the Edison patents were going in chiefly for serial thrillers and were establishing one reel as the maximum length for any picture. The independents had to surpass them. It was not enough to buy a foreign camera and throw out the mechanism, leaving nothing but the box and name plate to cover an actual Edison machine. Thugs hired by their rivals invaded the studios and smashed the cameras. Nor was it enough to bribe the technical men and the stars of the great companies; the law was on the other side and the courts issued injunctions. On one occasion Carl Laemmle fled to Cuba, taking Mary Pickford with him, and was chased by her mother on a tug-boat supplied by the trusts and carrying police officials with warrants. Finally the great trek to California began. California was three thousand miles away from the centre of litigation in New York and was only a short distance away from the Mexican border over which the outlaws could escape, as the outlaws in their pictures escaped at the approach of their enemies. But all of these things were insufficient because, in spite of vituperative advertising, the average spectator did not care at all about patent rights; he wanted to see pictures and, although the formula of the thriller

27 Pearl White in *The Perils of Pauline*, a 1914 Serial

28 Ruth Roland in *The White Eagle*, directed by W. S. Van Dyke in 1920

29 A typical Serial Shot from *Fantomas*

30 Mae Marsh and Robert Harron in *A Girl of the Paris Streets*, 1917

was a good one, it did not satisfy the appetite for movies entirely.

In Europe longer pictures were being made, more serious pictures. The long pillage of the classics was beginning. And some of the more intelligent independent producers in America took their cue from these pictures. With longer and better pictures they had a chance to beat the trust. Self-contained stories began to appear.

Once in every decade or so a picture appears which seems to sum up all the knowledge of picture-making existing at the time. One of these was *The Birth of a Nation*; another was perhaps Lubitsch's historical film of *Henry VIII*. But long before this, a one-reel film called *The Great Train Robbery* made the year 1903 a turning point in the history of the motion picture; it set the type of the American movie and, because the American movie for twenty years dominated the world, it had a universal influence. *The Great Train Robbery* had a complete story. It had a chase which became the staple of both comic and dramatic films in America. It had a brief dance sequence, it was based on a crime, and it ended with a close-up. It ran for years and for much of that time it brought in a profit of one thousand dollars a week. Long after its first appearance, it entered history again by being the film chosen for the opening of the first nickelodeon, a little shop converted into an auditorium, the standard American movie-house for years. Its success was again important because it helped the moving picture to break away from its position at the tail end of the music-hall programme. (In Paris the estate of the cinema was so low at the time that movies were shown free at little cafés as an inducement to the patrons to sit longer and drink more.)

Both in France and in America newspaper proprietors recognized the moving picture as a powerful stimulant to circulation, not because movie stars and their love affairs were good copy, but because millions of people wanted news in advance of picture productions and personality sketches of players. The publishers saw hundreds of thousands of people in every city flock to the adventure film; perhaps they felt that these people were actually non-readers; the pictorial daily newspaper had not yet been invented. If newspapers could make a tie-up with the movies, they might gain circulation. They did it by the simple expedient of publishing instalments of the serial thriller week by week as the new adventures appeared on the screen.

Fantomas and *Judex* and *Elaine* of the *Exploits* and *Pauline* of the *Perils* and various masked villains became part of the mythology of millions of children throughout the world. But there is no logic to the history of the movies. Side by side with the serial thriller we see the rise of the poetic spectacle, and while hack writers turn out a weekly instalment which consists of extricating the heroine from one impossible situation and throwing her into another one, one of the greatest of European poets, D'Annunzio, is preparing a scenario for *Cabiria*. For the first time a kind of grandeur is on the screen. The whole screen seems larger and deeper than ever before. Until now the camera has been restricted. *Cabiria* marks the breaking through of all the old aesthetic frontiers.

Thousands of pictures were produced at this time and most of them seem grotesque to us now, but it is worth recalling that as early as 1906 colour was used in the films, and pictures with synchronized sound—virtually talking pictures—were known almost from the beginning. By 1911 photography of sound had actually been recorded on the same film with a picture.

And four years earlier the man who was to have a really decisive influence on the whole art and industry of the motion picture, an influence extending twenty years in time and from New York to Hollywood, from there to London and Berlin and Moscow, entered the little studios of the Biograph Company: David Wark Griffith. It was Griffith's misfortune that his greatest work was finished by 1916; after that there were one or two memorable pictures, but what he had done for the art and prestige of the movies was all accomplished by *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*. Because of the long lapse since these pictures were shown, it becomes difficult to make a true estimate of his importance. Mr. Ramsaye says that Griffith created the syntax of the screen, and it is quite true that even in his simple little stories in his early Biograph pictures, the action was logical and, so to speak, grammatical. In great advertisements, Mr. Griffith asserted that he invented the cut-back and parallel action; like everything else in the early history of the movies, this is disputed, but certainly Griffith used them most effectively, and by using them he definitely snipped the silver cord which attached the movies to the stage. He saw that a film reproducing a stage play was a photograph,

31 On Location for *Way Down East*: Director D. W. Griffith with Cameraman William G. Bitzer

32 *The Birth of a Nation.* A Scene from the D. W. Griffith Masterpiece of 1914

an illustration and not a movie. Although he had been an actor, not a very good actor, himself, he knew that action on the stage was connected with words and action in the movies is an end in itself. He knew everything there was to know about the moving picture in 1915, and he had a remarkable feeling for its capacities. Twenty years later the great Russian directors were to be praised for rejecting the professional movie star and for giving actuality to their pictures by using mine workers and cab drivers and housemaids instead of stars; Griffith had taken a first step in this direction when he rejected the idea of using stars of the stage, and, instead, trained beginners or artists' models to work under his direction. The second of his great films, *Intolerance*, was shown in Soviet Russia almost continuously for ten years, not only because of its social ideas; it was used as a sort of text in the technique of the motion picture, and from it developed the system of montage with which the Russians eventually startled the world and reinvigorated the movies.

Griffith had always had a flair for melodrama. One of his favourite situations is the last-minute rescue which the film can exploit better than any medium. The point of the last-minute rescue is that the innocent victim does not know that the rescuers will arrive in time—in fact the whole situation depends upon two parallel actions going on at the same time. Griffith used to say that he got the idea of such actions from the Victorian novel, notably from Dickens; he might just as well have pointed to the Elizabethan dramatists who are very close indeed to the moving-picture technique, largely because they did not have to set an elaborate stage, and so could shift instantly from a battlefield to a room in a castle, until the time came to draw separate actions together. Even in his early and more intimate pictures Griffith made the camera play tricks with time and space; in the most massive of all his productions, *Intolerance*, he showed four parallel actions, one in Babylon, one in Judea at the time of the Crucifixion, one in France at the time of the massacre of the Huguenots, and one a modern story intended to illustrate the same theme. The method is a further enlargement of the freedom which he created for the screen by breaking through the limitations of the stage. Griffith saw that by dovetailing the ride of the rescuers and the terror of the besieged in a scene, he was multiplying the emotional effect enormously; the whole was infinitely greater than the sum

of its parts. In *Intolerance*, which was issued in 1916, Griffith not only extended the idea of parallel actions to the four major episodes of the picture, but he also went to the other extreme and gave us parallel flashes of tiny bits. Some ten years later, this became the marked characteristic of the Russian movie—a shot of an overthrown statue, a shot of a soldier's boot, a shot of a wheat field may appear at a certain time in a certain order to concentrate the meaning of an entire sequence of actions, to create an emotion and start a series of thoughts in the mind of the spectator.

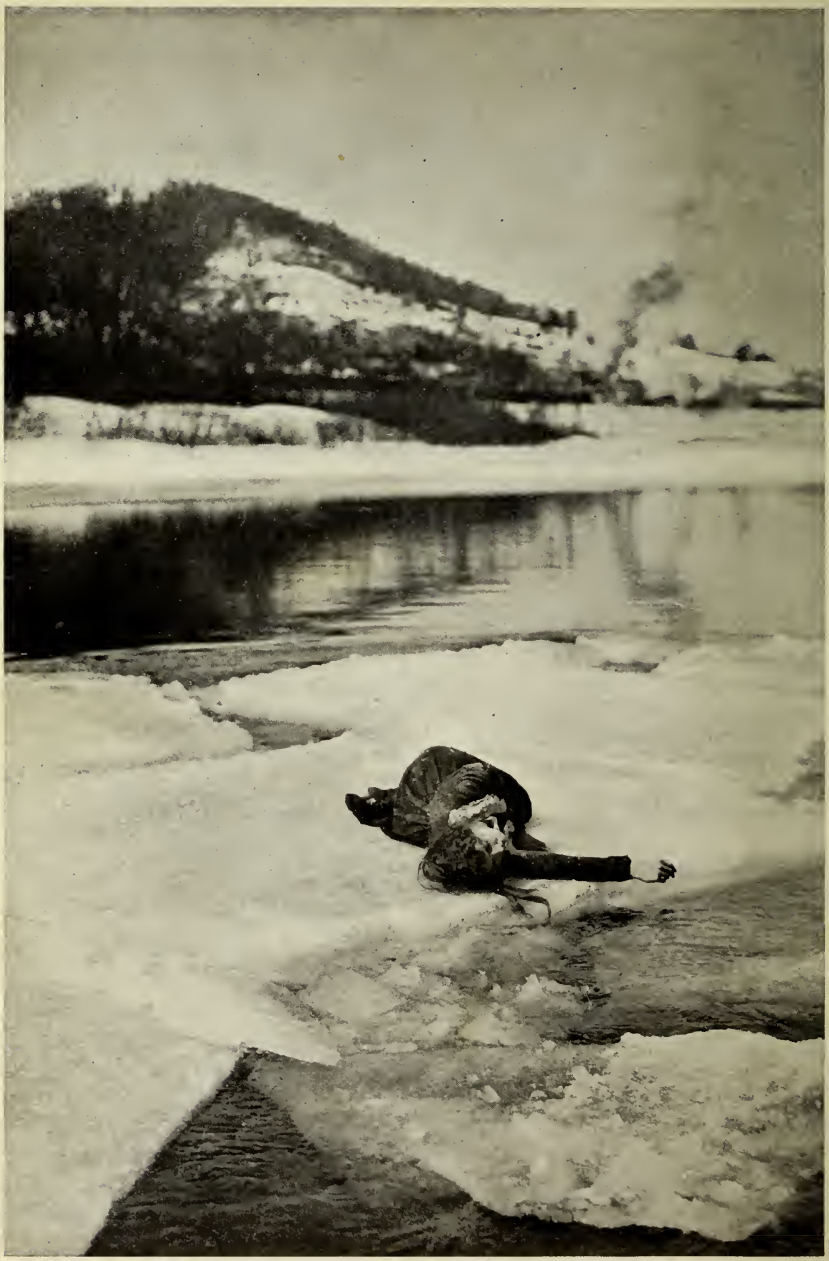
Griffith did much for the art of the moving picture and even more for the social standing of the moving picture. That work he did through *The Birth of a Nation* which, coming twelve years after *The Great Train Robbery*, not only condensed all the effective virtues of the movies at the time, but set a style and a form which was not substantially bettered for years. Long pictures and great historical spectacles had already been made, but usually they were made abroad or they were classics. Griffith, the son of a Confederate army officer of the Civil War, was captivated by a particularly cheap, prejudiced, socially vicious and on the whole contemptible novel of the post-war-reconstruction period in the South; the book was called *The Clansman*. There can be little doubt that he at once saw great moving picture possibilities in the hooded figures of the Ku Klux Klan riding in the dead of night to avenge injustice and to protect Southern womanhood from "dishonour worse than death." There was his last-minute rescue with a patriotic motive thrown in. But slowly, as Griffith worked on the picture, the whole Civil War became more and more important, and the story of the reconstruction developed far beyond the story of the Klan. The simple five-reel feature, then the normal movie, was being produced rapidly and, except for the salaries of the stars, inexpensively. Griffith worked slowly, and the money to finance the production dwindled rapidly away. Astute moving-picture producers refused to invest, and some of those who did invest tried to withdraw. The president of the Mutual Film Company put in twenty-five thousand dollars, but the directors refused to countenance his action so he made it a private investment—and, to anticipate the end, profited by a quarter of a million. Even when the picture was completed in twelve reels, the heads of the industry were so unaware of its value that there was a seriously considered proposal

33 The Babylonian Sets in Construction for *Intolerance*, 1916

34 *Cabiria*, 1913: Scenario and Direction by Gabriele D'Annunzio

35 *Intolerance*, directed by D. W. Griffith, 1916: The Babylonian Episode

36 *Orphans of the Storm*, directed by D. W. Griffith, 1922



37 Lillian Gish in the famous Ice-floe Episode in *Way Down East*, directed by D. W. Griffith, 1920

to issue it serially, one reel a week. At the beginning of March 1915, the picture opened in New York City at a regular theatre charging regular theatre prices for admission. A previous showing on the West Coast had brought reports of sensational triumph, and the publicity value of possible race riots was already being exploited. Nearly ten years later it was still breaking attendance records in large picture-houses. No picture made in the next ten years came within two million dollars of earning as much as this picture did. No single picture did as much to establish the movies as a legitimate and praiseworthy enterprise. And it was made within seven years after Griffith's entrance into the business.

There is hardly any plot in the usual sense in *The Birth of a Nation.* There is a love story wholly subordinated to the tragic events of the war and reconstruction. But ten years after seeing the picture, one remembers certain scenes and by a slight effort can arrange these scenes so that they have the tone and atmosphere of the picture itself; the rumour of war disturbing the bright life of the aristocrats of the South, the call to arms interrupting the young people as they dance to "Comin' Through the Rye," the great battle scenes with action stretching as far as the eye can reach; and the sudden contrast of a mooning love-sick soldier watching Lillian Gish move through a hospital ward; the burning of Atlanta on Sherman's march to the sea, the desolation of the South in defeat. Here the first half of the picture properly ends, and here occurs a tiny episode which in the more than twenty years that have passed has not yet been bettered on the screen. A soldier has made his way home from the defeated Southern Army; it had been a home of wealth and gracious living, and now it is bare. His young sister, seeing him approach and wishing to give some effect of gaiety, puts some raw cotton over her dress and daubs it with soot to pretend that it is ermine; she meets him at the door—an emotional meeting in which all the pain through which both had passed in four years mingles with the joy of being restored to one another; so far it is good, but not unusual moving-picture work. And then from the doorway the mother's arm reaches out and draws her son inside. Nothing else is seen except the movement of the arm and the disappearance into the dark doorway, yet then we know why the little scene between the girl and the brother has been played in the open—it has been only a preparation for the emotional climax which

has been created entirely by movement, without one facial expression, with no registering of emotion.

The second half of the picture is a great melodrama in the central episode of which the little girl is chased by a negro, and desperately fleeing, falls over a cliff and is killed; it is, of course, a moving-picture substitute for an actual attack. The riding of the Klans (to the music of the *Valkyrie*), which follows, is a highly dramatic spectacle. In spite of this melodrama, even the second half of the picture is filled with a kind of idyllic poetry. The whole countryside is peopled with characters who come to life no matter how briefly we see them.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to this picture is that after seven years of the talking picture, one does not think of *The Birth of a Nation* as having been silent in any derogatory sense; it is as if the people in it had spoken—which means that they were fully realized and lacked nothing of completeness. It is also remarkable that the picture was made without any great stars —instead it created stars, among them Henry Walthall, Mae Marsh, Robert Harron and Lilian Gish—and this was at a time when salaries of a thousand, two and even four thousand a week were being demanded—and being paid.

4

UNLESS the reader of this book has an unusual memory, his ideas of moving-picture money are centred on Hollywood to-day with its incredible palaces for movie stars, polo horses and airports privately sustained, and million-dollar productions. But twenty years ago, stars were getting ten thousand dollars a week, and one contract at least was executed—although it was never enforced—for a salary of a million dollars a year. Money had come on a grand scale to the motion-picture industry and was to remain thenceforward the dominant factor. The astounding thing is the rapidity with which these dizzying figures arrived. The reader will remember that in 1903 the one-reel picture was the sensation of the time. For the next five years or so, if a company troubled to buy a scenario at all, it paid about twenty-five dollars. Legitimate actors of the New York stage appeared, often under false names, grateful for a concealing make-up, at a hundred dollars a week. And then as if out of a clear sky—the million-dollar salaries! What had happened?

Actually two players, a man and a woman, had arrived, and it is no belittling of their quality to say that they were fortunate in the time of their coming. They arrived just at the moment of the full exploitation of the moving picture, so that all the pictures that went before contributed to the spectacular success of Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford no less than their own talents did. From 1903 to 1915 the moving picture was rolling up a vast cumulative effect. By the end of that time—when the peoples of Europe had gone to war—the people of America were going to the movies, and without instruction, almost against the wishes of the producers, they had chosen these two, Chaplin and Pickford, to be their favourites. A great many other things had happened. The Western film as well as the serial had been established; in the battle between the independents and the trust each had been forced to outbid the other in salary offers to the players. The moving-picture houses had become more comfortable and respectable, and above all the financial returns of *The Birth of a Nation* had persuaded the serious

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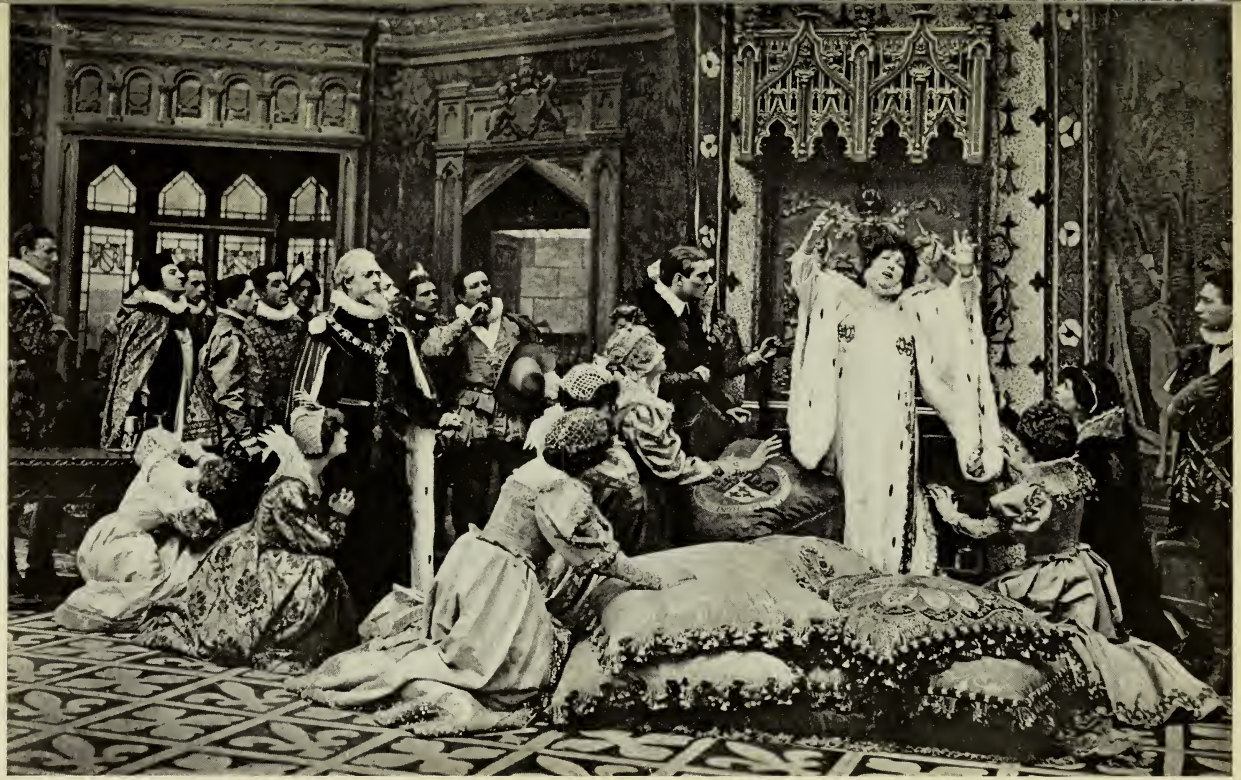
business men that the moving picture was something of a gold mine.

Mary Pickford was well on her way when she left Biograph and Griffith behind, infuriating Griffith who declared that he would make Mae Marsh a far greater actress than Miss Pickford had ever been. Miss Pickford went into an organization presently to be known as Famous Players. This was the invention of Adolph Zukor, who had been a fur dealer at one time and had gone into the business of penny arcades with phonographs and peep shows, and so had gradually worked himself into the fringes of vaudeville and moving picture business. A great deal is often written about the evil influence of the uncultivated, grasping business men in the moving pictures, but it is evident that they saw opportunities which others neglected. The opportunity which Mr. Zukor saw was to import the four-reel *Queen Elizabeth* with Sarah Bernhardt. It turned out well, and Zukor conceived the idea of "famous players in famous plays." This was before the complete acceptance of the long feature, and most of the producers not only discouraged Zukor, but did everything in their power to insure his failure. Actually Zukor's own formula would have insured failure if he had not been both cautious and enterprising. There was a need for a great many pictures, and Zukor knew that he could make perhaps thirty a year, but he did not believe that there were thirty famous plays and thirty or forty famous stage stars to go into them. So the product of the Famous Players Company was divided into Class A, which was to fulfil the promise implied in the title, and Class B, in which known *moving-picture players*—not famous players—were to appear; as well as a few Class C films about which few promises were made and no questions asked. At that time Mary Pickford, who was known as a picture player, was actually playing in a stage production of *A Good Little Devil*, but she came to Famous Players definitely not as a stage star. The company began with *The Prisoner of Zenda*, starring James K. Hackett, definitely a Class A picture. Others of the same type followed, but the public was not to be deceived. People did not like the Class A pictures. Famous Players, they felt, were out of place on the screen, and in the Class B pictures they found what they wanted and particularly they found Mary Pickford.

The moving picture had moved out of the anonymous stage. There was a time when "the Gaumont Girl" or "the Biograph



41 Sarah Bernhardt in *Queen Elizabeth*, 1911

42 Mary Pickford and Harold Lockwood, about 1914

Girl" was sufficient identification, and the producers did not encourage their players to publicity. Some made their way—the very fat John Bunny was easily identifiable. Mary Pickford was already known by name when she entered Famous Players, and when the irresistible logic of the box office proved that she was a greater attraction than any of the stage stars, the great salary race began.

At the end of 1913 the makers of the Keystone Comedies had engaged an English pantomimist and put him to work. In the summer of that year, Charlie Chaplin, then playing with Karno's Pantomime Company, had refused an offer of seventy-five dollars a week. Sometime later the offer was raised to one hundred and fifty; the cautious Chaplin accepted, but he was not to be hurried. He was booked to appear in Los Angeles in November, and it was not until then that he was ready to go to work with Keystone. Almost at once the moving-picture houses discovered that they had a new attraction; although his name was unfamiliar, the costume was distinctive enough, and pictures and little effigies appeared in front of the theatres; and then the first of the feature-length comedies, *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, was made, and although the typical Chaplin costume was missing, his genius was not. Other companies began to bid for his services. His own company fell out of the competition, and a year after he had begun his work as a comedian at one hundred and fifty a week, Chaplin signed with Essanay for twelve hundred and fifty a week.

It was perhaps in the course of these negotiations that Chaplin made one of his most famous remarks. He received an offer of a thousand a week and demanded one thousand and seventy-five, and when he was asked why he had to have that much, he said he wanted seventy-five dollars a week to live on. Accustomed to poverty, he had no faith in his own capacity to make money, and he seriously hoped to put away a thousand dollars a week and to live on seventy-five because he did not believe that he would last for more than perhaps a year; on the income from fifty thousand dollars in good bonds he hoped to be safe from the worst menace of poverty for the rest of his life. A year later Chaplin signed for ten thousand dollars a week with a bonus of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. For prestige it became imperative that Miss Pickford should have at least as much. There was not only the rivalry between Chaplin and Pickford, a competition to be the highest paid

player in the movies; there was also rivalry between the companies. At one moment Mutual, which was paying Chaplin over half a million, drew up a contract to pay Pickford that much as a drawing account and giving her fifty per cent interest in the new company and a guarantee of a million dollars a year. There was a hitch, and actually Miss Pickford signed again with Zukor of Famous Players with a guarantee of something over a million dollars in two years.

We are now in the realm of what is called important money, and the reader who has perhaps found some of the record of the movies a little distant and antiquarian begins to feel himself at home. Here are the stars, here are the fortunes; from this point it is easy to go to the great vamps and to Valentino. And here the movie patron must stop for a moment and look at another series of monetary figures in the movies and then ask himself in detail the question already hinted: whether he really knows why he goes to the movies. According to the well-informed *Motion Picture Almanac*, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* took in four million five hundred thousand dollars as gross rentals—that is money paid by the separate theatres for showing the picture—the amount taken in at the box offices of the theatres is, of course, much greater. Out of the *Four Horsemen* rose Valentino, the embodiment of the exoticism and glamour, the richly romantic figure upon whom women lavished an unparalleled adoration. The death of Valentino, if one were to judge by the history of his obsequies, must have expunged the word "love" from the book of life of millions. It is idle to protest that the funeral itself was in part a press agent stunt, because the significant thing is that Valentino so lent himself to that particular kind of publicity. Surely, if ever the producers were justified in a system of exalting a star, this was a perfect instance. Yet the truth is this: that Valentino was almost unknown when the *Four Horsemen* was produced in February of 1921. By November of that year, he was a great star, and he appeared in a moving picture of *The Sheik*, a novel which had had an extraordinary publicity, full of sex and romantic adventures in distant places; and this picture took in a gross rental exactly one-third as great as the picture made *before* Valentino became a star. *Blood and Sand*, produced the next year, fell slightly below this mark, and none of the other pictures he made appear on the financial honour

43 Douglas Fairbanks, 1918

44 Douglas Fairbanks in *The Black Pirate*, 1925

roll of the films' best properties, those which have grossed a million dollars or more. Severe critics of the movies protest against the star system because the pictures are thrown out of focus to overplay the individual, but the true argument against the star system seems to be *that successful pictures make stars and that stars do not make successful pictures.*

Here are the ten pictures, silent and talking, which have grossed more than three million dollars:

The Singing Fool
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
Ben Hur
The Big Parade
Birth of a Nation
Cavalcade
The Covered Wagon
The Jazz Singer
Sunny Side Up
Broadway Melody

Al Jolson was the star of *The Jazz Singer* and *The Singing Fool*, the former being his first film—he was a great star of the musical comedy stage before, but it must be remembered that *The Jazz Singer* came in as a triumph of the talking picture over the silent and *The Singing Fool* was a quick follow-up. Six of the ten are spectacle pictures which do not depend on stars. *Broadway Melody* was the first great musical with sound and dialogue. It would be fair to say that only *Sunny Side Up*, which also came in the comparatively early days of the talkies, owed a great part of its success to its star, Janet Gaynor. Following directly on the first ten are a series of comedies by Eddie Cantor, Harold Lloyd, and Charlie Chaplin, and in these the star system was definitely vindicated. A little farther down are the almost solo performances of Miss Mae West, but so great a star as Greta Garbo appears for the first time rather far down the list in *Grand Hotel*, which was in effect not a starring vehicle as it had an all-star cast. Some of the greatest stars, Joan Crawford, Douglas Fairbanks, Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich, Norma Shearer, either do not appear at all or come in haltingly toward the end of the list and usually in pictures which some special circumstance made otherwise notable.

Among the other illusions of the public and the producers is

the idea that sex is the essential element for financial success and popular pleasure in the movies. It is quite true that the ten pictures listed above provided a love interest of sorts, but it is also true that that interest is trifling. Not more than one in five of the most successful pictures could by any stretch of the imagination be called a love story. Of the first fifty pictures, only two starring Mae West are based specifically on sex appeal.

If the reader will turn to the illustrations, he will find in Figs. 47–51 a series of photographs showing the changes in the modes and manners of sex appeal through the short ages of the moving picture. The vampire type of which Miss Theda Bara was the most effective example is actually the popularization of the courtesan as people imagine she lived in the wicked French novels. It was not considered fitting that a simple American girl named Theodosia Goodman, born in Cincinnati, should create the image of fatal love on the screen. Her name was changed, and the moment *A Fool There Was* became a success, a systematic but amazingly successful publicity began. Mr. Terry Ramsaye notes that Theda Bara was announced as "the daughter of a French artist and an Arabian mistress, born on the sands of the Sahara. 'Bara' was indeed a mere cipher, being 'Arab' spelled backwards. That proved the rest of the story. 'Theda' was just a rearrangement of the letters of 'death.' This deadly Arab girl was a crystal-gazing seeress of profoundly occult powers, wicked as fresh red paint and poisonous as dried spiders. The stronger the copy grew, the more it was printed. Little girls read it and swallowed their gum with excitement." The vampire was foreign, voluptuous, and fatal; by way of contrast to her there was the long-suffering handsome fiancée or wife, who was everything the American man should hold dear—and in the end of the picture, unless he committed suicide, he did hold her dear in an affecting close-up. The vamp pictures raised a row: as often as the pie-throwing comedies were called vulgar, these pictures were called immoral. Then after a period during which sex entered pictures more or less through problem plays—and very dreary they were—it was left for the creator of another kind of exotic and dangerous love, Mrs. Elinor Glyn, to discover the new type, the It Girl. The War and "the breakdown of morality" had intervened; Mr. Scott Fitzgerald and a host of writers of less talent and integrity had popularized the idea that the young generation in the 1920's was gay and certainly talked a great

47 The Original Vamp: Theda Bara in *Salome*, 1918

48 The "It" Girl: Clara Bow with James Hall in *The Fleet's In*, 1928

deal about sex while it remained fundamentally decent. As soon as a new set of manners with new names for the unspeakable occurred, it became easier for the moving pictures to deal lightly or attractively with sex. But the superior physical attractions of the old-style vampire were still offensive, and Mrs. Glyn had the idea of endowing with glamour the healthy, athletic, hoydenish and extremely young American girl. Her choice fell on Clara Bow.

Miss Bow, of course, was not in competition with the tall, silken and slinky vampires of the past. There had intervened the rather magnificent and truly passionate impersonations of Pola Negri in the historical films made in Germany by Ernst Lubitsch, and Miss Negri's American pictures had also provided a more credible image for the screen. Miss Gloria Swanson and several other beauties gave an appearance, at least, of physical truth to the idea of love-making. When Mrs. Glyn discovered that there was a sexual aura or atmosphere hardly connected with physical beauty, she needed a special representative for this element. By focusing on Miss Bow and making her look about sixteen, by separating from It all the old attributes of the seductress, she launched upon the world an almost sexless figure around whom conversations about sex continually raged. Miss Bow and half a dozen other neat girls of the time were cheerful; they were playful, and amorous play was only a fragmentary element in the good times they were always having. They served a useful purpose because, false as they were, they broadened the liberties of the screen. Presently Lubitsch began to make polite comedies, and sex appeal became very dressy and witty. By a coincidence which should surprise no intelligent person, the better the comedies were, the less emphatic was the appeal of sex—it was only in rare cases that extremely talented individuals could make love and make fun at the same time.

Linking the old movies and the early talkies is the profound influence of the magnificent Garbo, who for a long time acted on the screen as if the entire human species gave her great pain; this was the middle period when she was provided with uninteresting scripts and only in a few moments in each picture could continue to appear as the finest tragic actress of the screen; following her, came Marlene Dietrich, playing the ideal mistress, silken, lustrous, unbelievably handsome and—unlike the screen Garbo—friendly. Yet there was some defect. *The*

Song of Songs, Sudermann's novel which has been violently attacked for its indecency, became with Miss Dietrich a series of artistic poses, so that seduction had to fight its way through sculpture.

Most of these phases of the treatment of sex in movies were based on the idea that sex is sin, an idea concerning which moralists may quarrel, but which dramatists eagerly accept because it adds a highly dramatic factor to their plays. The "sex as sin" theory came into considerable disrepute after the War—a large part of the moving-picture audience had, as they put it, "heard different"—but the moving picture was inhibited by moral standards, which are loosely called Puritanical, from proceeding directly to a realistic treatment of sex. Instead they stopped half-way with the implication that sex may be an inconvenience, and at best is a pastime and an excellent subject for conversation. At that half-way spot, almost all the women in the movies went completely up-stage, giving the spectator to understand they were too witty, too high-bred (or should it be high-toned?), too intellectual, too dainty, too delicate, to waste themselves on the likes of the men offered for their entertainment. The notorious incapacity of movie actresses to convey any real emotion is partially responsible for this impression, but not entirely. Let the reader recall the films he has seen in the past five years and try to remember a scene (something seen, not heard) in which a movie actress actually gave the impression that the character she was playing really was in love with a man, really desired him in the common way of human desire. Love, said the correct Dr. Johnson in his dictionary, is the passion between the sexes. How many times have you recognized that passion on the screen?

At this point enters Miss West. She had made on the stage an odd reputation by vigorous, downright, artistically fraudulent but humanly honest, exploitation of sex. Her plays had been denounced and she had even been sentenced to a short period in the workhouse for producing an indecency. For years the moving pictures, harried by the censors, made no place for Miss West. Then, as the depression swept in great waves over the country, it carried her to Hollywood and a picture was made. The story goes that the office of Will Hays, the final authority in these matters, protested against the picture, but that Paramount was so desperate that the company took the chance of offending the movie czar. As soon as possible

49 Mae West, the Bombshell of 1933

50 Off-stage with Clara Bow, Elinor Glyn, Antonio Moreno. *It*, 1927

51 Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong*, 1933

after the first tremendous success, a second picture was issued, and Miss West has the great distinction of having presented twice in one year a picture which grossed more than two million dollars—a picture, moreover, in which nothing counted except the situations she had devised for herself, the words she had written for herself to speak, and the image she created on the screen. Miss West's contribution to the treatment of sex on the screen is in effect the annihilation of two of the most famous feminine types in all literature: one is the seductress, the Circe whose love changes men into beasts, the vampire, the fatal woman; and at the opposite extreme, the delicate lady, shrinking from the advances of brutal men. In fact, her invitation, "Come up and see me sometime," as delivered in a gurgling voice, suggests for the first time on any screen that mutual satisfaction will result from the encounter. She destroys the idea that women have no satisfaction in love, and at the same time the idea that men's lives are ruined by love. The rudeness, the grossness, the humour are all brought into play in situations where this complete honesty about sex, personified in Miss West, comes up against the old false traditions. Even the physical properties of her person gave Miss West a kind of superiority over the slender manikins who were her rivals in the love-making of the screen.

It was rather a pity that Miss West persisted in writing her own scripts, because her later plays indicated that her imagination was not as lively in inventing situations as her talent was prodigious in projecting one single character. Her pictures began to be repetitious and only moderately successful. But she had brought something much needed to the screen; the movies had beglamoured themselves out of the range of most of their patrons, and the flat, icy, and far too intellectual heroines had become dehumanized. It was a relief to millions of women to see a woman rather like themselves get a hundred men with a look of the eye and an easily imitated wiggle of the hip. It was a pleasure to men to find a trace of hearty good humour about sex with no abstract conversations and no agonies of soul. The other players could not learn the lesson of Miss West completely, but she had an influence over the whole tone of the movies and probably stopped them from becoming as artificial in their treatment of love as the ancient courts of chivalry had been.

5

RUNNING side by side with the feature movies and indifferent to all the phases of the treatment of sex which I have outlined, were the screen comedies which burlesqued every type of screen siren as it appeared, made of love a comic predicament and of passion an absurdity. Always a despised poor relation of the movie programme—in the minds of the critics—the knock-about comedy often gave far more pleasure to the multitude than the heavy-handed features did. And at about the time D. W. Griffith was concentrating all the best elements of the serious picture and creating a definite form, Mack Sennett was producing a series of short Keystone comedies which are virtually classics in their style.

Everything grotesque came naturally into the work of Mack Sennett and his imitators; the too fat, the too lean, the absurdly bearded, the ridicuously dressed, raced across the screen throwing and receiving custard-pies, hitting one another with mallets, performing incredible acts of violence, arriving at impossible crises out of which they emerged in defiance of all the laws of nature. They celebrated the motor-car in a mad phantasy of speed—and yet when necessary, twenty Keystone Cops in a fleet of Ford cars were unable to overtake a runaway on foot. They celebrated the desperado of the vanishing West —and their guns shot around corners, the bullets from their revolvers were as numerous as those of a Vickers machine-gun, and although they always hit their mark, they never killed anyone. These pictures defied natural law, probability, and all human conventions. They roared with laughter over romantic love and another American fetish—success in business. One of my favourite moments is a combination of both of these burlesques, and although it required a sub-title, it has something of the essence of a Keystone. One of the grotesque marriages of these comedies is about to take place, and the mother of the bride sweeps in and whispers: "Faint quick—he's broke." They were never nice—and a dainty niceness was still considered essential in superior entertainment (even vaudeville, which had once been as rough-and-tumble in

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52 John Bunny in *Father's Flirtation*, *ca.* 1911–13

53 *Barney Oldfield's Race for Life.* A Mack Sennett picture of about 1913, with Mabel Normand

54 Ben Turpin and the Mack Sennett Bathing Beauties, 1918
(Phyllis Haver extreme left)

55 The famous Keystone Cops (including Ford Sterling, Fatty Arbuckle and Edgar Kennedy), about 1913

56 Harold Lloyd, Bebe Daniels and Snub Pollard in an unidentified comedy of about 1913

57 Buster Keaton in *College*, 1927

58 Mack Swain, Gloria Swanson and the Keystone Bathing Beauties, about 1915

America as the music-hall in England, attempted to "refine" itself at about this time). The roaring Keystone comedies put an end to that. And with an excellent feeling for contrast, Mack Sennett injected into these pictures of violence a whole series of bathing beauties who eventually became almost as famous as the comedians themselves.

The Keystone Comedies had, of course, nothing to do with the comedy of the theatre. There was no text, there was no plot. They were "shot on the cuff," that is to say, a director, a cameraman, and a group of actors went out with a few properties—perhaps a step-ladder, some painters' supplies, and a wheel-barrow; they proceeded to a street or a park or a lake, and with nothing more than a general idea of an action in their minds, created their picture. To this day when a director finds himself without a good dramatic ending for his story, he asks for a "Keystone finish"—that is something spectacular and preferably violent to startle the spectators.

The Keystone comedians were the descendants of all the true comics of the theatre. You can trace them back to Harlequin and Pantaloon and, farther than that, you will find them in the comedies of Terence and of Aristophanes. They used the same material — misunderstandings, disguises, violent anger over imaginary offences — and everything led to physical action whether it was a blow or a kiss. They destroyed the whole solemn framework in which the everyday man had his existence. Of them it might be reasonable to say that they satisfied our desire to escape from the habits and rules of our life and from the logic by which we had to live.

And yet Keystone Comedies were only inventive. One further step had to be taken—to become imaginative and creative—and this step was taken by a man who began with the Keystone Comedies and went far beyond them, but never forgot what they taught him—Charlie Chaplin.

About Chaplin everything has been written, everything true and false, everything silly and wise, everything romantic and critical, and the same things will continue to be written for a long time to come. He was destined by his genius to be the one universal man of modern times, and everything from the political and economic chaos in which we live to the minor change from silent to talking moving pictures itself, conspired to make his uniqueness more certain and more striking. His

start in the movies came close enough to the beginning of the pictures as a form of universal popular entertainment; he did not change with the changes in the movies so that, while his pictures improved vastly, they were never affected by the sudden whims and uncertain novelties which very slowly built up the structure of the moving pictures. A Chaplin picture in the 1930's is substantially the same as a Chaplin of the 1920's. When sound was added to motion, Chaplin had a choice between the art of which he was master—pantomime—and the art he had forsaken—which is acting to speech. He made the natural choice, and although he was conspicuously successful when he sang gibberish in *Modern Times*, the character he rendered was created in silence and will always remain independent of the words by which human beings communicate with one another. He began to create this character just as the world entered into the war which broke it in two; he continued the same character all through the long period of hectic prosperity in the United States; and when that prosperity came to an end, it was suddenly discovered Chaplin had always been showing us the universal victim of chance or fate, or of the cruelty and greed of the powerful. The little man who began by being grotesquely funny and ended by being comically tragic, was an attorney appealing in the highest courts of justice on our behalf, trying to win with laughter what the saints and the statesmen and the idealists had tried to win with indignation or trickery or tears.

But always laughter. For twenty years angry men had denounced the factory system known as "the belt"—in which one man repeats again and again for hours, for days and for years, a single movement by which he tightens a bolt or taps a wheel—without change and without end. Actually the system is not nearly as degrading as its enemies have said, but the point with Chaplin is that a few years ago a man, fresh from seeing a motor-car factory, gave him a particularly vivid description of the belt and, as Chaplin said,[1] "I saw at once that there was great comedy in it if I could only find a way to put it over." To Chaplin himself the belt system is inhuman and ridiculous; it represented, moreover, the mechanization which had so offended him in the moving picture itself; but his first instinct—an absolutely true one—was to express his dislike through comedy. Another Cockney, Charles Dickens, often did the same thing, but his instinct was not so

[1] In a conversation with the author.

sure and he fell over into mock tragedy. Just as a mathematician expresses things by one set of symbols and a painter by line and colour, Chaplin has to say whatever he feels moved to say, by making us laugh.

That is why it is impossible to begin anywhere except with the Keystone Comedies if we want to understand Chaplin. They have very little to say, but they adopted the traditional subjects for laughter and developed them in the medium of the moving pictures. Their particular style was knockabout, and Chaplin uses it whenever he needs it with a flagrant disregard of the delicate taste which, in the past century, has come to find everything robust a little vulgar. If he wants you to commiserate with a lover abandoned by his beloved, as he did in *The Circus*, he will show you the little man alone and melancholy, but you will have to remember that it is the same little man who walked the tightrope while the monkey clawed at his face. Or he will invert the method. He will show you a tramp waking from sleep in an open field, opening a battered tin box and carefully choosing the best of half a dozen half-smoked cigarettes which he has salvaged the day before. So that you can understand that the comic vagrant is a fastidious gentleman at heart.

I can foresee a bitter attack on Chaplin. He represents the dispossessed, the little man who has never had his share of the good things of the world. Sometimes the victim, as I have said, of cruel chance, sometimes the innocent bystander who suffers from the violence of others, often the direct victim of economic injustice. And yet this little man is never angry; he brings a flower to mollify an angry boss in a factory; he raises his hat to his eternal enemy, the policeman. There is an enchanting moment in *Modern Times* when, after Charlie has worked three hours—his first job in months—a strike is called and he comes out of the factory gates. The police are there forbidding the workers to congregate. One of them menaces Charlie and forces him to one side, and Charlie makes a little gesture with his hands, a gesture saying: "Even if you are in authority, there is no need to insist so much." There is rebellion in the gesture, but the action to which rebellion might lead comes in quite a different way. Moving sideways, to keep one eye on the policeman, Charlie accidentally steps on the end of a loose board—the board flies up and a brick which has been lying at the other end sails through the air and strikes

the policeman down. You feel, without any possible doubt, that the brick has done what Charlie wanted to do; you roar with laughter because a comic accident has accomplished what a cosmic resentment desired.

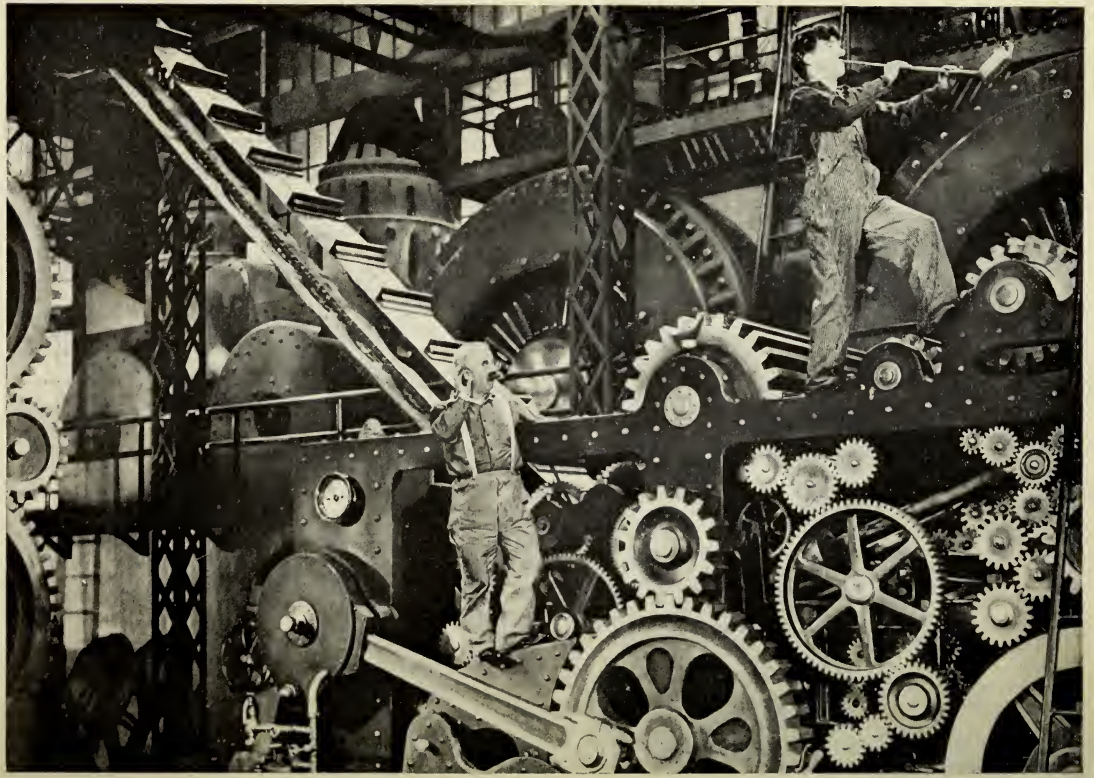
There are people who find in this method of Chaplin's a kind of economic defeatism. They are not satisfied with the accidental demolition of the policeman's pride, just as they are not satisfied with the comedy of the man who is trapped in the wheels of the big machine[1] so that a blue-print has to be consulted before he can be extricated. They want the little man of the Chaplin pictures to wreck the machine. They are furious over that characteristic ending of the Chaplin films in which the little man escapes from all the complications and torments of civilized life by walking away along the road that leads to no definite end. I think that they are suspicious of Chaplin because by making people laugh even at their misfortunes he makes life tolerable for them. It happens not to be Chaplin's temperament to make life seem intolerable. He has never shown the rich and the powerful as noble figures. Indeed, the most attractive of his rich men was only human and generous when he was drunk and turned heartless when he was sober. The truth is that Chaplin is like many others, an individualist in his criticism of society, apparently unwilling to join one tyranny in order to destroy another.

Or consider the magnificent *Gold Rush* as a whole. It is not altogether a parable and it probably was not made to teach a moral. But you cannot help seeing that it reflects some of Chaplin's own experiences, his thoughts and ideas. The happiest moments of the little prospector are all illusions. There is one heart-breaking flash of something approaching ecstasy on Charlie's face when he thinks the most beautiful girl in the dance hall is beckoning to him, but she is really summoning a man behind him. Perhaps never on the screen was enchanted contentment more perfectly expressed than in the celebrated episode when Charlie impales two rolls on forks and does a dance with them in the certain confidence that his beloved will come to dine with him. And she does not come. No one is lonelier than the same Charlie when he has struck it rich and has lost all his prospects of happiness. If you want to derive a simple moral from *The Gold Rush*, it is all on the

[1] Which incidentally fulfils an ironic as well as a comic purpose: so far as is known, all of the machinery in *Modern Times* manufactures exactly nothing.

62 *The Count*, about 1916

63 *The Gold Rush*, 1925



64 With Chester Conklin in *Modern Times*, 1936. Compare this picture with the Méliès

surface, and while it may be true, it is also a platitude that there is joy in action, but wealth alone brings no joy; the happiness of anticipation is greater than that of realization. But that moral does not account for the fact that in *The Gold Rush* Chaplin has condensed a vast burlesque of the adventurer in Wild West films; it does not explain why, when he is eating the sole of his boot and takes out a nail as one would remove a bone from fish, he is creating the essence of comedy before our eyes; it does not explain the wild teetering of a cabin over an abyss which is an element of pure physical fun. These are the things with which Chaplin builds; out of them he lets transpire the simple, essentially comic ideas of his pictures.

Unique in his genius, Chaplin became unique in his methods when he refused to make dialogue comedies. From that moment fun in the films went in one direction and Chaplin in another. The arrival of the Marx Brothers and the reappearance of W. C. Fields saved screen comedy, and it is interesting to note that Fields and one Marx Brother are both masters of pantomime. But the place which was once held by the one- or two-reel slapstick comedy of the silent films was actually taken by a new arrival—the dazzling apparition of Walt Disney.

The evil reputation of the movies as a whole rose from the supposed immorality of the feature films and the supposed vulgarity of the comedies. As the features became too dull to be even immoral, only the vulgarity of the comics remained as a stick with which to beat the movies. So it was gratifying that the comedies should have done much to convert the critic.

The comedies which gave offence were the rough slapsticks, the custard-pie and mad pursuit type, and if you are sensitive, you may say that they were unpleasant because much of the comedy had its source in brutality and ugliness. It is just as reasonable to say that they gave offence because they were remarkably bold and energetic in a tame and timid world. The explanation does not matter. Long after the Keystone Comedy had reduced pie-throwing almost to the point of a lost art, the accusation of vulgarity in the films continued, but it was misdirected. The actual vulgarity in the feature films—vulgarity of mind in the conception of films and vulgarity of taste in the confused lavishness of the execution—passed comparatively without protest.

Meanwhile Chaplin had compelled an alteration in the general view of the picture comedies, and those who could not resist his genius were hard put to it to prove that he had no connection with the despised type from which he rose. A half-dozen imitators, their original talent wasted because they developed nothing and imitated everything, only added to Chaplin's fame. Two men definitely rose to separate distinction—Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd. Of the two, Keaton had the greater imagination, for while he had only one manner—the dead pan, the inexpressive countenance with which he faced adventures with men, animals and machines—almost always the victim of his surroundings, but never overcome by them—there was always something endearing in Keaton's comedy, a kind of simplicity and softness.

Harold Lloyd was infinitely more inventive; he was admirably athletic; and he was hard as nails. When Chaplin enters a picture, he is caught in a whirlwind of activity, spun around in dizzy circles, and finally ejected as the picture fades from the screen. Keaton's line of action is like the wandering of a somnambulist, in ellipses, not getting anywhere in particular. Lloyd's line is a brisk march along a straight line at the end of which he is thrown back to where he started from and propels himself just as vigorously along the same line, but somehow manages to get a certain amount of comedy out of his obstinate repetition. He is by far more typical of the energetic American than either of the others.

In Chaplin one remembers a dozen impersonations which were fundamentally of the same character; Keaton is less memorable, but is fairly distinct. One recalls his difficulties as a naturalist or as a navigator in connection with the plot. But of Lloyd one recalls chiefly the hairbreadth escapes from high buildings which, after all, one suspected at the time were faked by the camera. It is reported that Chaplin once said of the other comedians with whom he was often confused that they were not even trying to do what he was doing. Whether he said it, or not, it is perfectly true. They were inventing situations when Chaplin was creating comedy. A gag in Hollywood quickly becomes common property and it was not unusual to see the same trick worked by several comedians. One which I noted long ago was done by Lloyd and Chaplin and perfectly illustrates the difference between the inventive and the creative. In each the comedian had to fight another man and stripped

65 Harold Lloyd in *Never Weaken*, about 1923

66 W. C. Fields in *It's a Gift*, 1934

67 The Marx Brothers in *A Night at the Opera*, 1936

off his coat for action. In each case he handed his coat to his adversary to hold and then knocked him down. In Lloyd's handling of the incident, you were pleased by a smart trick; when Chaplin did it, he made the gesture seem as traditional and courteous as the crossing of swords before duel. The gesture touched off the imagination for a brief moment, whereas Lloyd left it dormant.

There were dozens of other comedians, but either they could not invent enough (after Mack Sennett stopped inventing for them), or they were not good enough actors. They came together in groups of two and at moments did some insanely funny things, but their talent was too small and the pictures were no better for their presence.

As sound began to come in, comedy on the screen had ceased to be important chiefly because it had ceased to be funny. And then in a magnificent outburst, the screen presented the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields and the incomparable Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies of Walt Disney. Fields renders in comedy one or two aspects of the human male more disarmingly than any other actor; one knows him instantly and one loves him devotedly. There never was a liar more bland, a crook more innocent-seeming, an impostor more insistent on his patents of nobility, than the character Fields renders. Nor has anyone ever made so violent a human protest against the conspiracy which all inanimate objects have against our peace and comfort. The whole world is against him. There is no end to the irritations which Fields suffers from billiard cues, golf sticks, cranking handles of motor-cars, pieces of paper, household furniture, musical instruments, and from those nearly inanimate beings, men, women, and children, including the police. He suffers but he fights back, first with patience, then with irritation, finally in despair. It is not gallantry, however, but obstinacy that Fields expresses. He begins by brushing away the offending object because he is convinced that nothing can really seriously interfere with his plans for entertainment, and although he is compelled to struggle on through an endless succession of bad quarter-hours, he never for a moment concedes the bare possibility that his method is at fault. And with every look of his eye and every gesture and every rising note in his querulous voice he protests against the injustice put upon him.

He is a victim of circumstances, but he is also a rogue. He is

not roguish, you understand, but he is a rogue. It would displease him to do anything honestly which could be as easily done by chicane. He has a lordly way, a flow of astounding language, the grand manner of all the gentlemen of fortune, from those who sell patent medicine at street fairs to those who strand theatrical companies in charming rustic retreats. He cheats at cards. He is nimble-fingered, and when everything else fails he can distract by juggling—keeping upon the five cigar boxes or the two vases the same eye of bewilderment and reproach which he turns upon the world at large.

Fields is human; Chaplin is not. He is not because perfection is not human and Chaplin achieves perfection. A French critic has said that in his early works Chaplin presented a marionette and in his later masterpieces endowed that marionette with a soul. That is one way of putting it. It is also true that he created a figure of folklore—and such figures, while they sum up many human attributes, are far beyond humanity themselves.

On an entirely separate level, the Marx Brothers are not human, not mythological—they are completely fantastic and they seem completely mad. You never recognize yourself in any one of them as you do in Fields, nor ever see them express the essence of emotion as Chaplin does. Again and again the Marx Brothers act as we act in dreams, or as we would act if we dared, if the whole world were created for our pleasure. The eye of Groucho is insolent and he has a mouth for bright insults; the eye of Chico is slightly mad and everything he says is topsy-turvy; the eye of Harpo is a sly and roving eye and he says nothing; and what all three together do composes a masterly annihilation of the actual world. Chaplin has the gift of transposing any event into another key; as, for instance, when he examines the clock in the pawnbroker's shop, he rapidly becomes a doctor, a jeweller, a dentist, a salesman and a plumber before he returns to being a pawnbroker's assistant again. The Marx Brothers transpose from this world into one which has no connection with reality. In one picture they are besieged in a castle and not only do the United States Army, Navy and Marines come to the rescue, but caravans of camels, schools of porpoises, and finally all the runners at the Olympic Games. If the preamble or any clause in the contract seems dull or unfavourable to them, they tear it out of the sacred paper. They change an opera house into a ball field and Harpo eats

a telephone without giving the faintest explanation. It has been pointed out that they are far more super-realist than the Surréalists are. But there is a great distinction to be made between the Marx Brothers and the French writers and painters. The latter are convinced that man is linked to man by his "unreason." "The time has come," said André Breton recently, "for us to say that the man who does not see the horse on the tomato is a *crétin*." But the horse on the tomato is an excessively private concept. The Surréalist has carried to a fine point the doctrine of expressing what is interesting to himself, but on the way he has thrown over the original impulse out of which all the arts sprang, which was not to express the soul of the artist in the void, but to communicate with someone else.

The Marx Brothers' methods are all remarkably reasonable. They correspond to conscious desires which we suppress, not subconscious ones which we may express in peculiar ways. Running through the whole of *A Night At the Opera* was the perfectly common distaste of the average man for everything which is grand operatic, and this violence and animosity gave tone to the entire picture. When, in the midst of the scene from *Il Trovatore*, a series of backdrops were lowered behind the principals and they found themselves singing at railway depots or aboard armoured cruisers, the satisfaction one felt did not rise from the subconscious. The Marx Brothers start with everything that is reasonable, and the reason that they enchant us is that they depart at a tangent which we dare not attempt.

Their technique was built up in vaudeville, a medium which encourages speed, and they made speed itself part of their comedy. Again and again Groucho talks so fast that the listener can get only two-thirds of what he says. It is directly intentional. The bodily movements of Chico and the pantomime of Harpo are equally rapid. The very fact that we see many things happen so fast is in itself excitement, and excitement is actually the new thing which the Marx Brothers have brought into screen comedy.

Fundamentally Walt Disney brought no single new principle into the movies, but he combined virtually all of the good principles and created a series of masterpieces. Cartoon comedy is almost as old as the movie itself and, as the movies

grew more and more realistic, cartoons became more and more imaginative. There was even a forerunner for Mickey Mouse in the character of Krazy Kat. It was Disney's good fortune that he chose a new character, Mickey Mouse, just as sound entered the pictures and that he went rapidly forward to create the Silly Symphonies which were for a long time superior to Mickey Mouse, even if they were not nearly so popular. Gradually, after colour was added, the two types grew closer together and with the invention of Donald Duck, the Mickey Mouse series easily took first place. Taken as a whole, the work of Walt Disney is by far the most satisfying creation of the moving picture with sound; it is the most intelligent use of sound to support and enhance the action; it is the most satisfactory use of colour; and, above all, it is the only perfect use of the moving picture for the purpose of illusion and fantasy. There are other interesting makers of cartoon comedies. None so far has chosen so delicate a palette of colours as Disney uses; none has invented characters as attractive as his; and there is a regrettable feeling that what he has done first the others will eventually imitate. They are excellent in detail and Disney is matchless in his general conceptions. He has alone crossed over all the national frontiers and made the moving picture universally understood, as it was in its silent days. He has even had an effect on the ordinary movie comedy because some of the transformations from sense to lunacy in the Marx Brothers' pictures are fundamentally like the transformations of a piano into a human being in the Silly Symphonies.

Disney came upon a world which had forgotten the Keystone Comedies. Actually they and the ordinary comic strip in the newspaper are the direct ancestors of the creatures he has placed upon the screen and of the method he uses. In the Keystone Comedies a taxicab may mow down trees and telephone poles and one hundred shots be fired from one pistol, and this defiance of all probability is the beginning of the Disney method. But it was only a beginning because in the cartoon comedies you do not need a revolver at all—a pencil sharpener transforms itself into a machine-gun. Disney and the men who work with him all have a highly developed trick of seeing similarities between incongruous objects. Once they can establish this in a reasonable way, the mind of the spectator is so enchanted that the artists can go on to the wildest extremes of fantasy. The laws of the Disney universe are perfectly

68 Roscoe ("Fatty") Arbuckle and Mabel Normand in a Mack Sennett Comedy, *ca.* 1915

69 Gloria Swanson in Keystone Comedy, *ca.* 1917

logical and are implicitly obeyed; all you have to do is to accept them and you are perfectly happy.

There have been learned discourses on Disney's relation to modern painting, and a great many people consider Disney as the great satirist of the machine age. In him, without a doubt, the machine becomes human—just when humanity is afraid mankind will be turned into a machine. To an American familiar with the American habit of tinkering with mechanisms, Disney's attitude in this respect is not particularly surprising. An American is not a machine worshipper—he is far too familiar with the machine. But he likes machinery and one might say that machinery likes him; they get along easily and with good humour.

Certainly there is no conscious philosophy in the work of Walt Disney. The one thing which is conscious is the deliberate invention of character. The success of Mickey Mouse all over the world proved that even little children are particularly interested in a character whom they can recognize—Mickey Mouse became the hero of a sort of adventure serial. Presently the Big Bad Wolf appeared as a formidable character in the *Three Little Pigs*, two of whom, at least, were so skilfully rendered in music and action that they could hardly be called types, but were actually rounded characters. Not all of Disney's inventions are equally effective. Pluto and Horace Horsecollar are only amusing illustrations; whereas Donald Duck bids fair to out-rival Mickey himself because he is a more clearly seen person and his characteristics, although few, are sharply outlined.

The freshness and gaiety of these pictures make them always a relief after the stale familiarity of the feature picture which so often repeats the same situation, trying to make it appear new, not by the use of the imagination, not by creating characters, but simply by inventing a new dodge. Instead of the railroad train, the transcontinental bus, and presently instead of the bus, the trailer. Supply an actual work of the imagination to the producers of the movies and they will generally return a good job, sometimes an improvement on the original; but to make some three hundred pictures a year, they require at least two hundred and fifty stories which are not created but contrived, not imagined, but invented. That is the weakness of the moving picture to-day.

6

An American in France in the early 1920's would have recognized "Charlot" as Charlie Chaplin, but would have wondered at "Lui" or "Malec" because Lloyd and Keaton, whom these names indicated, never seemed to him to be so clearly defined characters. But most surprising of all, the American would have heard talk of the great character of "Rio Jim" as the noble, legendary, almost mythological creation of the American screen. Obviously to French children in the last years before the War "Rio Jim" had the same exotic appeal as the Redskins of James Fenimore Cooper had had for an earlier generation. If a Frenchman went on to describe this character, unknown to Americans, gradually a light would dawn: the long face, the stern cold eyes, the two guns, both shot from the hip, and the grandeur of the bad man who sacrifices himself in the end for the woman who shall never know how deeply he has loved her—these could only be the properties of William S. Hart.

Hart was another of those actors corralled by Famous Players and one of the very few who turned out to have a real talent for playing in the movies—one suspects that perhaps he had not been a great actor on the stage. He had the good fortune to work under Thomas H. Ince, who was not as great a director as Griffith, but by way of compensation was not disturbed by so many grandiose and irrelevant ideas. Ince, I am told, was probably the first director to cut his own pictures so that they hung together well; and Ince with Hart as a star, continued in the great tradition of the Western thriller. The Western thriller was in fact only the translation to the screen of the dime novel which had as ugly a reputation in the late 1890's as the movies were to have ten years later. Of the subjects most favoured by the paper-backed serials, the great detectives (Nick Carter being the most famous) did not make a profound impression on the screen; nor did the boyish hero Frank Merriwell; nor did the exploits of the heroes during any of the American wars; but the bad man and the sheriff, the dancing girl and the tenderfoot all succeeded.

The West was in fact just beginning to come into its own.

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70 William S. Hart, the prototype of Western heroes

71 Mae Murray in an early Western (title unknown), about 1917

A college professor was presently to startle all the other professors by saying that the frontier had determined and created the character of America. Theodore Roosevelt had written an impressive and exciting work on the winning of the West; and best of all for the purposes of romance, the Wild West had ceased to exist; the last battle with the Indians had been fought and the war between the small farmers and the great ranchers was nearly over. So the West was already history and had glamour. The movies fell upon it rapaciously—their instinct, as almost always, was right. The romance and the melodrama of America were in the West. They had in fact been raised to the level of respectable literature, and one of Theodore Roosevelt's friends, Owen Wister, had written in *The Virginian* the almost perfect sentimental novel of the West and the East.

The Wild West was right for the movies because everything that had to be said about it could be said in action—in movement. There was the movement of the covered wagons in a straight line from East to West; there was the encircling movement of the Indians attacking the pioneer; there was the oblique movement of the bad man, and the movement of the sheriff's posse, spreading out fanwise to intercept him; there was the march of troops to save the surrounded settlement. The characters in these enterprises were all of the simplest, as all heroic and legendary characters should be. What made men bad (and women remarkably good) was not for the moving picture to inquire; there they were, good and bad, and the good were to be threatened by the bad, but the bad were to be defeated by the good. The dance hall, the pony express, the stage coach, and everywhere hundreds of magnificent horses—these were the properties, these and guns. Nothing else was needed. *The Great Train Robbery* was fundamentally a Western. The Western was to repeat itself glorified in the 1920's as *The Covered Wagon*; and to reappear under a strange form as the gangster picture of the 1930's. The gangster picture in fact is the only modern movie which in any way attempted to create such legendary figures as the silent pictures had done in the comedies, the serials, and Westerns. With the passing of the gangster, the creation of mythology is left entirely to Chaplin, if he continues to work, to the Marx Brothers, if they fulfil their promise, and to Disney.

The world which has been enchanted and rather horrified by the gangster movies owes a great deal to an energetic and

inventive producer named Darryl Zanuck. He is himself something of a legend. He began to write stories for the pictures and then discovered that he was paid fifty dollars for a story and the scenario writer who worked on it got five times as much, so he transformed himself into a scenario writer. The moment came when all the studios were going mad about great writers, so Mr. Zanuck made himself into a novelist. He actually did publish a book which included some of his rejected stories and a novelette which he wrote as an advertisement for a hair restorer—and after announcing publication of his book with all the *éclat* of a Hollywood première, he sold not only the rejected scenarios for movie material, but the novelette about the hair-oil as well! Apparently irresponsible, devoted to the absurd practical jokes by which Hollywood diverts itself, and keenly aware of his business, Zanuck rose rapidly in the field of production and it was while he was an executive of Warner Brothers that he became suddenly aware of the possibilities of gangsterism as movie material. He was, actually, rather late because Chicago had been a bloody battlefield for years, but the movies had been timid. Zanuck was not. He threw everything he had into making *Public Enemy* and put into it James Cagney, one of the few very fine actors of the screen.

The cycle of gangster pictures—there were, of course, dozens of them—was important in screen history for several reasons. In the midst of the world depression, the movies suffered with all other industries and the gangster pictures re-animated the screen and brought men trooping back to the movie houses which they had begun to abandon to women and children. It is a remarkable thing that while the handsome heroes of the screen are supposed to be attractive to women, the handsome women of the screen also attract women to the movies because they are supposed to represent the ideals towards which all women aspire: they are beautiful, well dressed and ultimately successful in love. But apart from Mae West, few of them became the "dream girl" of many men. (A photograph of Miss Myrna Loy, I should note, was once published in an American magazine under the title "The Dream Wife of a Million Men," but that also is exceptional.) Men found the movies feminized and the great change came when Mr. Cagney in *Public Enemy* was being annoyed by Mae Clarke and rudely

75 James Cagney in *The Public Enemy*, 1931

76 Sylvia Sidney and Henry Fonda in *You Only Live Once*, directed by Fritz Lang, 1937

77 Paul Muni with Henry Armetta in *Scarface*, 1932

ground half a grapefruit into her face. From that time on it became common form for the tough guys of the pictures to kick and slap their women around on the slightest provocation and roars of delight rose from the throats of men who had up to that time found nothing satisfactory in pictures except the newsreel and Mickey Mouse.

The second point was that as the depression spread, the moving-picture companies tottered and one by one put themselves into the hands of banking houses. They became then more cautious than ever in touching upon any actual problem of national life. Every Russian movie sang the delights of tractors and the Five Year Plan; every German movie was to show the triumph and glory of Nazism; but the American moving picture turned so far away from the actual facts of daily life that it hardly dared to show even the hardships which democracy hoped to conquer. It was not until President Roosevelt had changed the psychological atmosphere in which the country lived in 1933 that the movies began falteringly and falsely to recognize the fact that there had been a depression. As for the major social problems of the time, they neglected them entirely. It is said, for instance, that every company in Hollywood was greatly excited about making a picture showing the munitions racket and gave up the idea because they found no way of treating the subject without giving offence to all the major powers and to the munition makers of America who are closely associated with the bankers. The moving picture was an "escape mechanism"; but while the thoughts of millions of people were for the first time deeply concerned with serious problems, the pictures became more trivial and were losing authority. The gangster cycle provided one subject which was contemporary, urgent and real, and by using it the movies made themselves as lively as the headlines of the newspapers; they gave the impression of being about to tackle real problems in American life. It was a deceptive promise, but it was a great deal for the movies to do.

Several years later Hollywood did try a few strong subjects. It put into the skilful hands of the German director Fritz Lang a story about mob rule and lynching, out of which he made the excellent picture *Fury*. A terrorist organization was found to be operating in Michigan, and, after it had been exposed, several pictures were made which condemned the idea of organized murder for political purposes. There have been several

pictures dealing with the victims of cruelty in jail—the best known of them was *I Am A Fugitive From a Chain Gang*. But presently it was brought to the minds of the producers that although the heroes of such pictures were always miraculously innocent and foully tortured, the impression was becoming fixed that men in prison were badly treated. There followed then some pictures indicating that if criminals were paroled, they were very likely to commit a few murders in quick celebration of the benevolence of society.

A straightforward, direct tackling of the problems brought about by the depression under Hoover or the zigzag course of recovery under Roosevelt was not attempted in Hollywood. Perhaps the greatest defect of the Hollywood producers is that they have been unconscious of the major interests of the vast majority of their patrons. They have not dared to take the side of the middle class upon whom they completely and utterly depend. Except for a few conventional jeers at Communism and a few equally conventional smiles at the possibility of dictatorship in America, the Hollywood film has been sterile of any political interest. The advantage has been that the Hollywood film has not been used for propaganda. There can be no doubt that not only the controlling bankers but also some of the producers fancy themselves as social dictators, and it is quite possible that if they chose to let the political and social atmosphere of their time appear in their pictures, they would distort them into illiberal propaganda. It is a pity that so much that is important should be omitted from the films, but possibly omission is better than the kind of treatment which Hollywood, in the jittery state of economic chaos in the world, would give. It must also be remembered that Hollywood has apparently no capacity whatever to deal with ideas on the screen and no experience in doing so. I am afraid that pictures with a political angle would not be as well made as those of the Russian propagandists.

And that brings us to the third of the effects of the gangster picture. Almost all of the examples in this style were good pictures. Although they made famous half a dozen tough verbal expressions, they were not overloaded with dialogue as other pictures of that time were; they were primarily action pictures, and the action was rapid and stunning. Cagney and Edward G. Robinson (*Little Caesar*) and dozens of men with sinister faces, actually recreated on the screen the image of the

bad man which had disappeared with the Westerns. The gangster pictures were really the perfection of the silent movies with dialogue superimposed. Yet I think it is correct to say in the gangster picture the talkies found themselves, and that all pictures made after the gangster cycle was finished are more terse in speech and more vigorous in action because of the invigoration which this type of picture brought to the screen.

7

It is said that when Zanuck read the account of a gangster massacre in Chicago, he cried out: "Why, this is war," and he meant his movies to waken the conscience of the American people. In this laudable enterprise he was at least partly successful; it is generally accepted that the gangster pictures were a great help in speeding repeal of the Prohibition amendment. On the other hand, the gangster on the screen was usually played by the best actor in the cast. He was more daring, more active, more sought after by women and altogether more attractive than his victims or his enemies. In short, little boys on the streets not only wanted to play gangster, but refused to play any minor part in the gangster game. So the question of censorship rose again, and that is the fourth important effect of the gangster cycle upon the movies.

Censorship in some form is almost as old as the movies themselves. The illusion of reality created by the movies is so effective that even adult minds cannot constantly check themselves with the inner truth that they are seeing "only a picture." The fact that movies of actual events are also made, adds to this confusion. On the immature the impact of the moving picture is instant and beyond criticism. On the morbidly Puritanical the effect of the movies is unnerving. It must be stated also that in the early days of the movies, when the costs of making a picture were very low, many unscrupulous people made movies to be shown at stag parties, movies of an extreme licentiousness, and not content with these private reels, tried to come as close to filth as possible in pictures meant for the general public. The aesthetes and the Puritans on one side and the pornographer on the other made censorship inevitable. Local or state boards were set up, and gradually they extended their powers until the list of excisions from films was full of absurdities, and what was tolerated in the State of New York was rejected as dangerous to the morals of citizens of New Jersey across the river. The censors have gone far beyond the original intention; they are not only protecting the accepted sexual morality, but are definitely moving towards a concealed

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78 Norma Shearer, Maureen O'Sullivan and Charles Laughton in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, 1934

79 W. C. Fields and Freddie Bartholomew in *David Copperfield*, directed by George Cukor, 1935

political censorship. In that respect, however, the producers have no quarrel with them; but they do want to tease and thrill their spectators.

It was actually not a moving picture but a scandal in the private life of a moving-picture star that suggested the way out for the producers. This was the famous Fatty Arbuckle case which technically ended when a jury found Arbuckle innocent of the death of a young woman after a riotous party at which both had been present. But the reputation of the moving-picture people was tarnished. Some years before, after a financial scandal in organized baseball, a "czar" had been appointed, a well-known judge. Now, ten of the leading producers of Hollywood joined to ask a member of President Harding's Cabinet to serve them. Mr. Will Hays, an elder of the Methodist Church, became President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America. The invitation to him said nothing about censorship. The great men of Hollywood said that they "realized the necessity for attaining and maintaining the highest possible standard of motion-picture film production in this country and are striving to have the industry accorded the consideration and dignity to which it is justly entitled, and proper representation before the people of this country so that its position, at all times, may be presented in an unbiased and unprejudiced manner." To this day the official position of the Hays organization is that it exercises no censorship. Once in a while a slight error may be made; the Hays office is reported as saying that a certain book or play is not suitable material for a motion picture; but in general the approved method is for a producer to submit a story to the Hays office and the Hays office then informs the producer that in all likelihood if he makes the picture, he will have trouble with the state boards of censorship. That is all, but the formula, or something similar to it, is sufficient. The producers know that the Hays office has turned thumbs down. I have already noted that Paramount is supposed to have made the first Mae West films in spite of an adverse judgment, and this would go to prove what Mr. Hays says: that he does not actually exercise a censorship over production. In fact the Hays organization is one of the most active opponents of censorship in the country. The high moral tone which he brings to the movie business is intended to make people feel that the movies censor themselves and that no outside censorship is required.

Yet at intervals demand for more drastic action occurs. Between them, Mae West and the gangsters brought on one of the most serious of these attacks, and in an unexpected way had a long-range effect on the movies. Led by Catholics, the clergy of all the principal denominations began seriously to discuss the idea of boycotting films. By a series of skilful manœuvres Mr. Hays blunted the edge of the sword which hung over the pictures. The movies promised to be good.

And to be good, they needed stories which were pure. Within a month after the second of Mae West's spectacular successes appeared, another picture showed the way—that was *Little Women*, based on an American classic of the middle of the century—a story of young people, innocent and charming. It was an almost miraculous success. (The production cost very little and the movies discovered that simplicity and a pure heart would make money.)

There was a third element—dialogue film was now about five years old and new techniques had been developed; the players had learned how to say English words so that they conveyed a meaning; and it was time for the movies to do something on a large scale.

These three conditions made the Victorian novel an ideal source book for the pictures. The very name Victorian was a guarantee of purity and respectability. *Little Women* had proved that the costumes of the mid-nineteenth century have charm; and Victorian three-decker novels provided so much material that plenty of plot could be derived from them. Moreover, as the producers discovered when they set to work, the Victorian novel is moral enough, but it is moral about sin, so all you had to do if you wanted to restore sin to the pictures without offending the zealots of morality was to lift off a thin layer of sentimentality and there sin was, as attractive as ever. Dickens and Thackeray and George Eliot were imported to Hollywood. And if the Victorian era, why not the Elizabethan? Shakespeare followed.

The thing producers did not know was that Shakespeare and the Victorians were, above all, interested in human beings. They had their plots and their dramas, but the action was carried out by men and women who, even if they were caricatures, always had character. This was a new thing and it was this that gave the moving picture a new depth and a new interest.

For two generations producers had been proceeding on the

80 A Scene from Max Rheinhardt's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1936

81 Emil Jannings with Lewis Stone in *The Patriot*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, 1928

82 Rin-Tin-Tin, about 1925

83 Shirley Temple, 1936

Hollywood Prodigies

quite justifiable assumption that we are excited by action. And the reason, incidentally, for the overwhelming influence of the American movies is that they always put action first, whereas foreign movies are always ready to sacrifice action to pictorial beauty, to ideas and to emotions. For a long time action was enough; it is still enough in many instances. But when the images on the screen began to talk, they at once became more like ourselves and we wanted to know them as we know our friends.

In this respect the Victorian novelist was closer to the mark than the modern. We know and care for our friends not for what they do, and say, but for what they *are*. We may be attracted, when we meet a man or woman, by an important action or by a witty remark, but in our commerce with our friends, we do not expect them to be always exciting or always amusing. We do not abandon a friend because on occasion he is dull; we have a long-established interest in him which passes far beyond any superficial excitement. A familiar gesture, a trick of repeating certain words, a note of the voice, and, most important of all, the way we know a friend will respond to what we say, the way we know he will act in a given situation—these are the things we care for. They make up his character which we learn to know very slowly and which becomes definitely a part of our own lives. Directly after the World War it became apparent that the writers of both Europe and America were no longer interested in bringing forth characters as we had known them before. Perhaps it was not the time for them to be born. The War had made us suspicious of greatness and of grandeur. It had definitely broken down the tradition of heroism. Writers were critical of their own heroes and took pleasure in exposing their heroes' weakness; they were critical also of their villains and took pleasure in exposing their villains' merits. Only the writers despised by the literate dared to create saints and devils or romantic heroes untouched by any corrosive criticism. These writers were well rewarded. The great sales of A. S. M. Hutchinson, Ethel M. Dell and, earlier still, the author of the Pollyanna books, marked a definite separation between the popular novel and the novel which had any pretensions to being called literature. The writer who wanted the respect of the intelligent felt he could gain it only by sacrificing the support of the multitude.

And there the moving picture came in. It had no interest whatever in critical approval; it had always created popular

figures, usually in films of adventure, whether comic or melodramatic, and the greatest of these figures, as I noted before, became legendary heroes. Some of them were fine actors and some were not; almost without exception each of them created a simple and sustained character which persisted through dozens of pictures. I have noted that the French gave new names to Keaton and Lloyd and Hart and Chaplin, and this was not only because their real names might be difficult to pronounce and remember. It was because they separated the character on the screen from the actor who played the character; Chaplin was a man who lived in America and was involved in a divorce case, but Charlot was not a man, he was a semi-mythological figure who appeared in pawnshops or restaurants or flop houses. W. S. Hart was another man who lived in America, but Rio Jim was the hard-riding gambler, bandit and "good bad man" as legendary as Robin Hood. And whoever the actual Keaton and Lloyd were, Malec and Lui on the screen were as real as Harlequin and Punchinello. Even in America where "personality" is a mania, certain figures had this half-mythological character. The heroes and heroines of the adventure serials were not so much identified by name as Mary Pickford was. In the Wild West pictures, a horse had something of the character of Pegasus and later Rin-Tin-Tin, although identified by name, became a dog of mythology. In the comedies, Fatty Arbuckle might be identified; but he also was the common "fat man" of comedy. The Keystone cops were a legend and the bathing beauties another. Douglas Fairbanks at the beginning came close to creating the legendary young hero, good, agile and successful in love. All of these became parts of the mythology of the generation which entered the World War—perhaps the first war in history of which no legend has survived and from which no hero emerged.

This is as good a time as any to stop a moment and consider the connection between the private life of Hollywood and the films which Hollywood makes. To the purist about the moving picture all the gossip about Hollywood life is an impertinence. He believes—and he is perfectly right—that he would enjoy a film of the French Revolution just as much if he had never heard that the woman playing as Charlotte Corday has, after three divorces and four "romances," finally married an assistant camera-man. If Mr. Charles Laughton were

84 A Hollywood "Home" and its Owner, Tom Mix

85 Jean Harlow as a "Brownette". Publicity up to date

persuaded to play the father of Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, a real lover of the screen would be excited or apathetic in accordance with his judgment of Mr. Laughton's capacities as an actor, and the publication of the actor's favourite recipe or his ideas on labour unions would not alter the critic's emotions in the faintest degree. To such a purist the advertisement which was actually used: "Garbo Loves Taylor in *Camille*"—is openly offensive. It distorts the actuality which is that Marguerite loves Armand; it throws the emphasis on the private lives of two players instead of on the lives of the characters whom they represent; it brings up the rather difficult problem of continuing this personality method because, if Garbo loves Taylor in *Camille*, Garbo also dies in Taylor's arms in that picture and therefore had to be miraculously resuscitated to love Boyer as Napoleon in her next picture.

There is a great deal to be said for the purist's attitude and, oddly enough, some of it should be said to the financiers who put their money up for the movies. I mean that by the merciless exploitation of the private lives of their stars, they are killing off valuable properties. There is only a brief period during which a star can sustain the synthetic glamour which publicity throws about her. Perhaps half a dozen stars have captured the public imagination at its very highest point for more than five years; two or three stars have made a successful comeback after the glamour has died down. It is natural that the public will grow tired of publicity about any group of individuals and that a new face or a new pair of legs or a new twist to a smile will very rapidly run down the value of the old.

In a sense the producers do not want their stars to act. It is only after the primary charm of their personalities has evaporated that stars are allowed to play what they call "character parts" (as if the principal rôles in any dramatic action were carried by people without character). The producers themselves foster the idea that their beautiful women have no talent. Miss Jean Harlow, having been launched as an actress because she was a platinum blonde, actually startled the public with comic talent of a rather high order; but the second wave of her popularity was based on the discovery of a new shade of hair dye, somewhat revolting, called "brownette." The cosmetic talents of Hollywood are incalculable, but it is easy to see that the variations are not limitless; whereas the appeal of good acting is everlasting. For instant results, a new make-up, a new lover

or divorce, a touch of synthetic glamour, and a good leg are excellent commodities; ten thousand are interested in what Miss Carole Lombard thinks about acting with her divorced husband and only one or two individuals care about art. But as a sensation dies, its beneficiary ceases to be attractive at the box-office, whereas a success firmly grounded on good acting asks no outside help. So long as the movies live by the drivel in the fan magazines, they are wasting their substance, building up reputations only to see them die, and, what is far worse for themselves, destroying their long-run hold on the public.

If human beings could really be convinced by argument, remorseless logic would prove to them that they are being tricked by unworthy means into seeing far too many unworthy moving pictures. Obviously the great guns of publicity, shot off for hundreds of players, must boom dozens who are second-rate, for every one of the first rank. The logical critic could point out the inescapable fact that five years from now, when all the publicity about the lovely ladies and handsome men has been forgotten, their pictures will be no better and no worse than they are to-day. The logician would insist that we do not require glamour from cooks, railway conductors, and manufacturers of motor-cars, all of whom render desirable services to us; he would go further and suggest that we are being bedazzled by a false glamour so that we do not recognize the obvious truth: that many of the stars in the movies are not rendering to us the service we have every right to demand. So the logician would make his two points: first, that the movies actually lose money because the professional life of a player is too closely connected with his or her private life and, second, that the patron of the movies wastes money because he is getting a false romance instead of a good moving picture. And having said this, one must recognize the fatality that millions of people do find in the private lives of the moving-picture stars a whipped-up excitement which ultimately sends them to the pictures in which the stars appear.

Now as to the scandals of Hollywood, there are three general attitudes: first, that Hollywood is a sink of iniquity; second, that Hollywood is remarkably pious; and, third, that Hollywood is just about what every large American city is. To find any truth is extremely difficult. Hundreds of sharp-eyed men and women watch every restaurant in Hollywood to report that X has lunched with Y, to announce that X has stopped lunching

with Y who is wearing a diamond ring presented by W and that the wife of W danced with M and that actress R and director L have disappeared from location together and have gone off to Palm Springs. These reporters have invented an argot of their own, behind which ancient phrases like "living in sin" or "committing adultery" are only half hidden. But even moving-picture players can sometimes be reticent about their private affairs. It is true that a few dozen very well-known players have made a habit of quick divorces and sudden remarriages; but it is also true that the prejudice against divorce in American broke down in the 1920's, and there is nothing fundamentally hostile to current American morals in contracting many marriages, one at a time. I have no way of telling whether the sanctity of the marriage bond is as carefully observed in Hollywood as elsewhere—and to say "as elsewhere" is definitely unfair to Hollywood, because Hollywood remains to this day a boom society. In spite of the encroachments of the Federal income tax, five hundred of the most conspicuous moving-picture players, producers, writers and directors are all living lives of extraordinary luxury. Half of them at a fair guess have had no background of wealth at all, and they arrive with dramatic and spectacular suddenness in an environment which seems to require a lavish and senseless expenditure as proof of artistic success. Not to spend money in certain ways is proof either of eccentricity or of apprehension that one's salary will not be increased or, crowning disgrace, one's option will not be taken up. To invent new and fantastic ways of spending money is a good way to prove one's financial solidity as well as to get publicity; and when one remembers that the comparatively solid society of New York also gets its ideas about entertainment from paid specialists in the art of giving parties, it it not unreasonable to think that the Press agents often suggest the extravagances for which the stars pay.

The work they do is under pressure—especially pressure of time. This does not seem so to the casual visitor on the lot. Hours seem to go by between one take of a scene and another, and the two takes appear to be identical; but at their backs the players always hear the cries of the expert accountant pointing out that each day's delay adds to the cost of production; sometimes a star is engaged for a precise number of days and his part of the picture must not only be finished in that time, but the retakes also must be made. Sometimes it is the rental of the

studio, sometimes the services of the director, sometimes the cost of great mobs of extras, which brings pressure. And there is general pressure getting the picture out to meet a schedule formulated in advance. There is no question that the actual work in Hollywood is racking and arduous, and many players absent themselves from all enjoyment while they are in the midst of making a picture; so it is not remarkable that they make up for it in the intervals of relaxation. And, considering the idolatry which has been worked up for them, it is not surprising that they are full of whims and see no reason why they should not gratify all of them.

There is also this to be noted, that nothing is too trivial to be published as gossip about Hollywood. What the Press Department does not issue, the ferrets find out. Thus it is reported that a rising young star earning a thousand dollars a week has allowed his father to remain on the dole. Thus the divorces of great-aunts of minor stars and accidents among remote cousins of juvenile players all run through the newspapers. Connecting all these, one gets the impression of an extraordinary amount of unpleasantness abounding in Hollywood. I suspect the impression is wrong, but it is quite true that the screen has attracted a large number of people of a not particularly stable temperament, people who might have had one or two conspicuous experiences in their lives if they had been always in the company of the well-balanced; but in a business which makes a fetish of temperament itself, these people with a high potential capacity for disaster have come together and each has aggravated the others. Divorces, scandals, bankruptcies, murders, suicides, failures, all figure in the record of Hollywood, but they figure excessively because the same individuals appear too often; and in spite of the best efforts of the Press Departments, it is not possible to make news out of comparatively quiet and happy lives.

There are people of intelligence and charm in Hollywood. There are actors who read newspapers and know what is going on in the world, there are writers who are not drunkards, there are dancers to whom tact and good manners are not a veneer, and there are a considerable number of people who not only understand the very difficult techniques of the moving picture, but have a pretty clear perception of their responsibility in making the moving picture. From time to time an enthusiast announces that Hollywood is the modern Athens or the modern

92 Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, 1930

93 A recent photograph of Marlene Dietrich

Paris, but that is fortunately not true, because if Hollywood became an intellectual and aesthetic centre, it would probably stop making good pictures entirely. It is actually the counterpart of nothing in the ancient or European world. In a relaxing climate, in a country built up after the coming of the motor-car and therefore built spaciously, a civilization has grown up based on exceptional wealth and exceptional prominence.[1] For a long time the society which grew up here was supposed to be engaged in an utterly contemptible pursuit; it was not until long after the moving pictures began to make millions of dollars that the moving-picture people began to be considered respectable. The responsible ones among them carry on their private lives with the requisite minimum of decency; the rats are perhaps more conspicuously ratlike because of the money they have to spend.

All of this might well be skipped if the results did not appear on the screen, but the romances and liaisons, the highly advertised marriages and abrupt divorces, seem to affect the actors and actresses of Hollywood, so that they are complex human characters in their private lives and on the screen either reproduce themselves, or have no character whatever. In between these two areas of their lives, the private and the professional, there lies the connecting link, the fan magazines in which are recorded, and more often invented, one hundred thousand details of the domestic lives of the players. Why one is a vegetarian and another will never marry, what everyone of them thinks of every problem ever presented to the human mind, how reading Plato makes it possible for an actress, who obviously has not a grain of intelligence in her head, to support the creative ardours of her career, the reason why nineteen separate Hollywood couples adopt foundlings and what Shirley Temple expects to do with her fortune—these things and millions of words about dress and cosmetics and what makes Dietrich glamorous and how Gary Cooper is irresistible to women, are an actual factor in the making of the moving picture.

The readers of the fan magazines are, broadly speaking, the people who pay to see movies. Out of these magazines and the thousands of columns of newspaper publicity that cover the same ground, the movie patron creates a reality—and that

[1] Even in modest houses in Hollywood it is possible to heat any single room, without affecting the others, by pressing a button connected with a gas-furnace.

reality is what the patron goes to see on the screen. Change it in the slightest degree and his disappointment—more often her disappointment—would mean disaster at the box-office. That is why Joan Crawford and Marlene Dietrich and Carole Lombard and Loretta Young and Norma Shearer and all the rest have to play substantially the same character again and again.

Like all other actors, they have their own pet ways of indicating certain simple emotions—and they are not to be blamed if they dig into their bag of tricks when those tricks have proved more effective than any others they can master. They are only open to criticism for this: that they constantly project a personality, usually the personality built up in their private lives, and seldom attach themselves to the character which they happen to be playing on the screen.

This brings us back to our point of departure, which was the creation of screen characters. The moment people on the screen began to talk they were individualized. In silent pictures, we knew almost nothing of the thoughts of the characters; pantomime miraculously expresses feeling, and we could identify ourselves instantly and completely with a character precisely because we really knew nothing of his mind (which separates one man from another) and knew so much about his heart (which brings them together). We could speak for them, if we had to speak, because they were silent. But the moment they were able to speak for themselves, we were able to argue with them, to disagree with them, to separate ourselves from them. Perhaps this means that the dialogue film cannot create a myth—it is even doubtful whether it can create a hero, although one group of pictures already exists as a warning to us not to be too sure in this prediction. The gangster cycle actually filmed exploits which were already legendary. The valiant effort to make the officers of the law equally romantic was not a success—the G-man who talked never quite inspired the imagination as much as the Western sheriff who was silent and shot from the hip. The difference makes you suspect that human beings are still doubtful of the most familiar way by which man communicates with his fellows—that is, talking. Or perhaps the strain on the intelligence is still too great and everything outside of the commonplace of ordinary conversation, any words which carry meaning or emotion, require such an effort from us that we cannot take them into our hearts.

94 Norma Shearer in an early Role: *The Tower of Lies*, with Lon Chaney

95 Norma Shearer as Juliet, 1936

It is true that a catchword will identify Barkis or Mrs. Gamp for us, but I suspect that we were very much affected by the illustrations in the works of Dickens and no word of Sancho Panza is as bright in our memories as the vision of him on his donkey. In the movies the difference is even more marked. Take their gangster pictures in which the language was hard and exciting. Do we connect any words specifically with any gangster? Or do we take phrases like "going for a ride" or "so you won't talk" merely as general indications, familiar tags by which we identify certain bundles of actions and ideas? Are not the gestures of Edward G. Robinson's *Little Caesar* the things we remember? Or the nervous rocking of James Cagney's hands in *Public Enemy*, or in that same picture does any spoken word compare with the dreadful moment when the corpse, bandaged like a mummy, is flung through the open door?

What we see affects us much more violently and directly than what we hear—that is well known. From the movies I think we learn that things seen skip an intellectual process as if certain lobes of the brain were short-circuited and the visual effect goes directly to our emotions, while everything expressed in words has to be filtered through the mind. When only the well-educated read books, they carried on these filtering processes, and transmitted, to the great majority, images like those creatures of fiction I have mentioned. The characters which come down to us in actual myth and folklore are reported in words, but words of such simplicity that they require no intellectual activity from us. But the process of creating characters which live on after we encounter them on the stage, in a book or in the movies, is definitely interrupted if we have to think over the meaning of what they say.

Between the legendary figure and the rounded character as we know it in fiction or the drama, the moving picture had to create a bridge of its own. The natural tendency was to let personages in a movie talk so much that they told us enough about themselves, their inclinations, their idiosyncrasies, their likes and dislikes so as to become humanly recognizable characters. Unfortunately this was hostile to the nature of the movie. Some slow-paced pictures did render characters, but they were very bad pictures. The better way was to create such action as illuminated character and of this one now begins to find excellent examples. Consider the case of Gary Cooper, who was for years a rather up-to-date W. S. Hart. He was a

tall, interesting-looking man to whom things happened; love and war happened to him in *A Farewell to Arms*; courage happened to him in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*; what happened to him in a dozen other movies need hardly be named; he was a glass of water in which various coloured pellets had been dissolved. And, like a glass of water, he was defined only by his container—by the particular costume he wore, or plot he took part in.

But in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, Gary Cooper rendered a human character, not a complex one, but a definite one, and you can pick out the precise episodes in this picture by which the character was expressed. Mr. Deeds (Gary Cooper) is a young man who inherits twenty million dollars, but is far more interested in finding a good rhyme or playing the tuba. The moment comes when he is to take the train for New York City and the entire town comes to the railway station to bid him farewell, with a brass band playing the traditional song, *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*. But Mr. Deeds is nowhere to be found until finally he is discovered playing the tuba in this salute to himself. You know then, among other things, that he is totally without self-consciousness and that doing his part in any group would be more important to him than receiving the homage of the multitude. There are a dozen moments like this in the picture. Few of them have anything to do with the plot; the one I have mentioned actually *slows up* the development of the major action. But they fill out and round out the person in whom you are expected to be interested, and they do this so well that when the action becomes a little bit stuffy, as it does in this picture, you are quite content to wait for the next interesting episode to occur because you trust and like and are absorbed in the character.

I have chosen Mr. Cooper, not because he is a conspicuously colourless player, but because obviously he can create character if he is given the slightest opportunity to do so. The same thing has happened to Clark Gable; it happens fitfully to Frederic March who let the entire adventure of *Anthony Adverse* slide by him as if he were an animated costumier's dummy, but who played Bothwell in *Mary of Scotland* with extraordinary power, so that actually a rather shadowy Bothwell was more of a real person than Queen Mary herself.

The moving picture accepted from the stage a peculiar

96 Gary Cooper: a recent off-stage picture

97 The Oriental Vamp of the Nineteen-twenties

98 The Sophisticate of the Nineteen-thirties: with William Powell in *The Thin Man*

Myrna Loy

distinction between stars, or leading men and women, on one side, and character actors on the other. A character actor in general means a woman who no longer pretends to be young or a man who will grow bushy eyebrows and a beard; that is to say, character actors almost always exploited some physical oddity and were willing to be comparatively broad in their technique. But in the movies more markedly than on the stage, the result was that character actors became more and more interesting, while the others presently had no character whatever. Mr. Charles Laughton rose quickly to his place in the moving pictures because he never had to play the young romantic leads. As far as the American tradition goes, he was physically incapacitated as a screen lover and would be limited to expressing such passions as would make him unsympathetic to the audience.

The work of compelling Hollywood players to render a character, instead of representing themselves, is done, whenever it is done, by producers and directors. Miss Myrna Loy for many years acted a part, a purely conventional, attractively villainous seductress. She was sufficiently liked, but it was only after she deserted that rôle and deftly played the character of the wife in *The Thin Man* that she became sensationally popular. Credit for this goes to Mr. Van Dyke. In the case of Victor McLaglen, there are stories current in Hollywood of the spell which the director, John Ford, can cast over this actor, who seems totally without talent in most other pictures and is magnificent under Mr. Ford's direction, as in *The Informer*. By one of his many shrewd guesses, Mr. Goldwyn divined the presence of a capable actress under the famous slant eyes of Merle Oberon; he discarded the highly advertised make-up, gave her a simple character to play, and vastly increased the range of her appeal. Cagney, E. G. Robinson, Roland Young, and a number of others, being actors in the first place, have had to fight only against stereotypes; Paul Muni, definitely a character actor, provided a memory as Pasteur which contrasted with Muni as a fugitive from a chain gang. Although the voice of W. C. Fields as Micawber was the voice of the most endearing comedian of our time, the character he created was fresh and complete, accomplishing the small miracle of convincing even those who "saw" Micawber totally different in physical aspect.

Charles Laughton as Bligh, Ruggles, and Mr. Barrett of

Wimpole Street, is the most conspicuous instance of an actor escaping from a type; Mae West and Shirley Temple are the two most obvious examples of players compelled to neglect their great creative talents—they are both remarkable actresses —in order to exploit a speciality in as many films and as rapidly as possible. Bette Davis, like Spencer Tracy or Warner Baxter, will either exhibit a bag of tricks with sufficient talent to fool an audience or blaze into an astounding creation as she did in *Of Human Bondage* and *Bordertown.*

It is impossible to put down a formula for testing great acting on the screen. In fact, there are quite a good many critics who believe that acting on the screen does not exist. One point which is often made is that moving-picture players do not create a part, they act for four or five minutes with long intervals between and the director is the only person who sees "the part" as a whole. Sometimes this fragmentary method has important physical results. For instance, the celebrated scene in which Juliet drinks the potion is extremely difficult for an actress to play on the stage because by the time it arrives she is wellnigh exhausted, and the actual drinking of the potion comes at the end of a long soliloquy which mounts in a perfect spiral of terror; for the moving picture the actress can approach the scene fresh and unweary at the beginning of a day's work. The defect of this system is that unless the player carries a clear conception of the character in his mind through twenty or thirty days, during which the script is being filmed, we may have on the screen a perfect jumble of characters all passing under the same name. So long as the characters themselves are not important and are merely illustrations of action this is not serious. But on rare occasions we see a character actually embodied for us. We know that the intelligence of the player has clearly conceived the part and all of his talents have been put into service, not of himself, but of the character he is playing. Then we know that we have seen something great, even if we do not know how it was done.

This assumes that players are capable of understanding the characters they portray and are permitted to know what the characters are. In the old silent days, D. W. Griffith preferred not to tell his players anything about the plot or the characters; he dictated the emotion to be shown, with a meagre hint about the episode then being filmed; and actually he got excellent results. In talking pictures the players have to know enough

to give sense to the words they speak; whether they always do is a question.

Last year the favourite story in Hollywood, a story told by writers and actors, but by no directors, concerned an actor who was called in on short notice to do a small part. The director explained it: "You are an old retired sea captain and you're sitting here at this desk, and then you look up and you see Jack coming down the stairs, over there. You get up—you haven't seen him for ten years—and you say, 'Why, if it isn't my old friend Jack!' Then you remember, and you put your hand behind your back and you sit down again. Do you think you can do it?" The actor thought he could, but every time he did it the director cried out in pain that it was all wrong; after dozens of rehearsals and retrials the director repeated the instructions over again, and in desperation the actor asked, "What is it I'm supposed to remember?" and the director said, casually, "Oh, didn't I tell you? You're supposed to be suffering from leprosy."

If this is fantasy, the solemn testimony of a distinguished actor is not. He was to play the governor of a district in a costume play. "Shall I take it frivolously," he asked, "or solemnly, or shall I make him a damn fool, or what?" And the director, one of the best in the business, replied, "What are you asking all those questions for? You're playing the governor. You know—Merriam is governor of California—well, you're governor of this place." He knew nothing more of part or plot—and turned in a much applauded performance.

The coming of the classics to the screen is important in the way of prestige and, as I have suggested, because it gave the pictures a really great opportunity to deal with human character. But it was not an unmixed blessing, because the producers counted on the reputation of the classics to save the pictures from the reproach of dullness. Max Reinhardt, with comparatively little experience of the moving picture, received the commision to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; given any ordinary stage, Mr. Reinhardt always went in for parades and processions and the exploitation of crowds, colours and fabrics; it was not surprising that with the wider scope of the movies he nearly smothered Shakespeare in textiles; the surprising thing was that the fine character comedians developed independently by Hollywood, James Cagney, Joe E. Brown, Hugh

Herbert, Frank McHugh, should have managed to save the picture. Mr. Cukor's *Copperfield* and *Romeo and Juliet* both had languid moments which he would not have ventured to leave in if he had been making an ordinary picture. A great many of the classics naturally turn into costume pictures, about which Hollywood has never been happy; it should be noted that costume plays are not the brightest jewel of the American stage. The heavy style, slow-moving, dignified, and a little dull, which has been developed for making classic pictures naturally is taken over when directors want to add impressiveness to a modern story, usually one based on a significant novel. Thus there was a certain solemnity in the production of *Lost Horizon*.

While these important pictures were being made, the studios spent a great deal of time on two other types. One is the elaborate musical show which is a descendant of the original pictures of backstage life with which the talkies first made their successes; the other has so far no definite name but has easily recognized characteristics—it is in almost every case a studio product and if it is based on a play or a novel, the original almost certainly was written with the movies in mind; the resulting movie is light-hearted, illogical, full of unrelated incidents and animated by a tremendous rush and urgency of action which will cover a multitude of artistic sins. *Mr. Deeds* is such a picture. *My Man Godfrey* was another and there are dozens of others. The danger which the movies now run is that all their prestige will come from one kind of picture and all their pleasures from the other.

About the musical shows of the movies, the best thing that can be said is that they are not as bad as they threatened to be. After the unexpected but well-deserved success of Fred Astaire in the witty, compact and unostentatious picture, *Roberta*, the producers saw that merely multiplying the number of show girls or straw hats or water-lilies in a musical setting was not the only way to make a profit. The succeeding pictures of Mr. Astaire with music by Kern or Irving Berlin, blossomed out a bit on the luxuriant side, but were still comparatively restrained.

Unfortunately just at this moment one of the most lavish of all moving pictures, *The Great Ziegfeld*, was produced and was remarkably successful. Unique perhaps in the annals of the movies was the award of the Academy Prize for acting to

99 Charles Laughton and Clark Gable in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, directed by Frank Lloyd, 1935

100 Katherine Hepburn in *Mary of Scotland*, directed by John Ford, 1936

101 A Scene from Cecil B. De Mille's *The Crusades*, 1935
Historical Reconstruction

Louise Rainer in this musical picture. (Miss Rainer's playing was not directly connected with the lavishness of the picture as a whole.) For the most part the picture was imitative and uninteresting, but the extravagance of its presentation carried all before it and probably influenced the mode of musical pictures for the next few years. Ziegfeld—the actual person, of whose life the picture was a highly romantic version—had produced revues; and revues are going to be much the thing in Hollywood—loose-jointed productions, in substance a series of vaudeville acts, strung together on a negligible plot.

It is perhaps only fair for me to confess a long prejudice against all musical shows on the screen (with the exception of those which are run to death, as musical shows, by the Marx Brothers). The banality of the single plot which has sufficed for some ten years for such shows is only a secondary objection; the primary objection is that in none of the essential elements of such a show does the moving picture improve upon the opera house or the concert hall; and the movies invariably stop moving for long periods during these pictures. The only merit I find in them is that the players are unable to gratify their obvious desire to give encores.

It is perfectly natural that the movies should exploit sopranos and tenors who bring them a fortune; it is deplorable that they have found no way to do this while continuing to make reasonably good moving pictures. (*The Gay Desperado* provided a glimmer of hope in this respect. The singing was not treated sanctimoniously and the picture was gracefully entertaining.)

In one technical respect the super-colossal musical show is excellent. The eye of the camera can do miracles with the manœuvres of a vast number of chorus girls as they are taken from above or below or in trick shots which make them appear at impossible angles. They really have nothing to do with musicals at all and become something exciting to see in themselves. But really great dancing, solo or in duet, does not come off very well on the screen. I do not know why this is so; I only know that there is a totally different effect from seeing Mr. Astaire on the stage and seeing him on the screen—a fact not connected at all with his presence or his personality, but connected with how much one sees of his dancing. As for songs, they are inevitably sacrificed to the necessities of the stars or the extravagances of the scenic designer and one has to wait until one hears them elsewhere to know how good they are.

8

It has been hinted several times in this book that the most important individual in the making of a moving picture is the director. In order to escape any entanglements about this individual, I would say that he may be called by another name, but he is the man who ultimately is responsible for what we actually see on the screen. In a few happy cases that responsibility begins early with the choice of the novel or story or play which is to be filmed; it embraces collaboration with those who work over the story and prepare the treatment and dialogue; it covers also the selection of the leading players and then, after the picture has been shot, a considerable authority over the cutting. Sometimes these responsibilities are divided among the producer, supervisor, scenarist, casting director, director and cutter; in these cases the man to be praised or blamed for the result is the producer, but it is impossible to say at what point he may make or ruin a picture. Sometimes a producer and his staff work so amiably and understandingly with one another that the picture which results is harmonious in all its parts. At other times there seems to be no single idea on which any two people working on a picture have actually agreed. The scope of a director's influence and responsibility which I have outlined above is the bare minimum which a producing director would require for the theatre. He would certainly add to the list some supervision over costumes and settings, make-up, properties and a dozen other details. The assumption in the theatre is that after the play has been written it must be presented by one person who understands it completely and who will harmonize all of the separate interests which go into a production. The problems in the movies are so varied and the requirement for experts is so great that this kind of detailed supervision is almost impossible. The good director deputizes much of his work, sometimes too much.

The idea that the director is the central figure in making the movies is not a popular one with financiers, writers, players or cutters. It is a favourite idea with critics, and as one of those who began to sense the importance of the director some twenty

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102 Director Ernst Lubitsch among his Batteries of Cameras and Lights

103 John Ford (with megaphone) directing *The Iron Horse*, 1924

104 Raoul Walsh (centre foreground) directing *What Price Glory?*, 1926

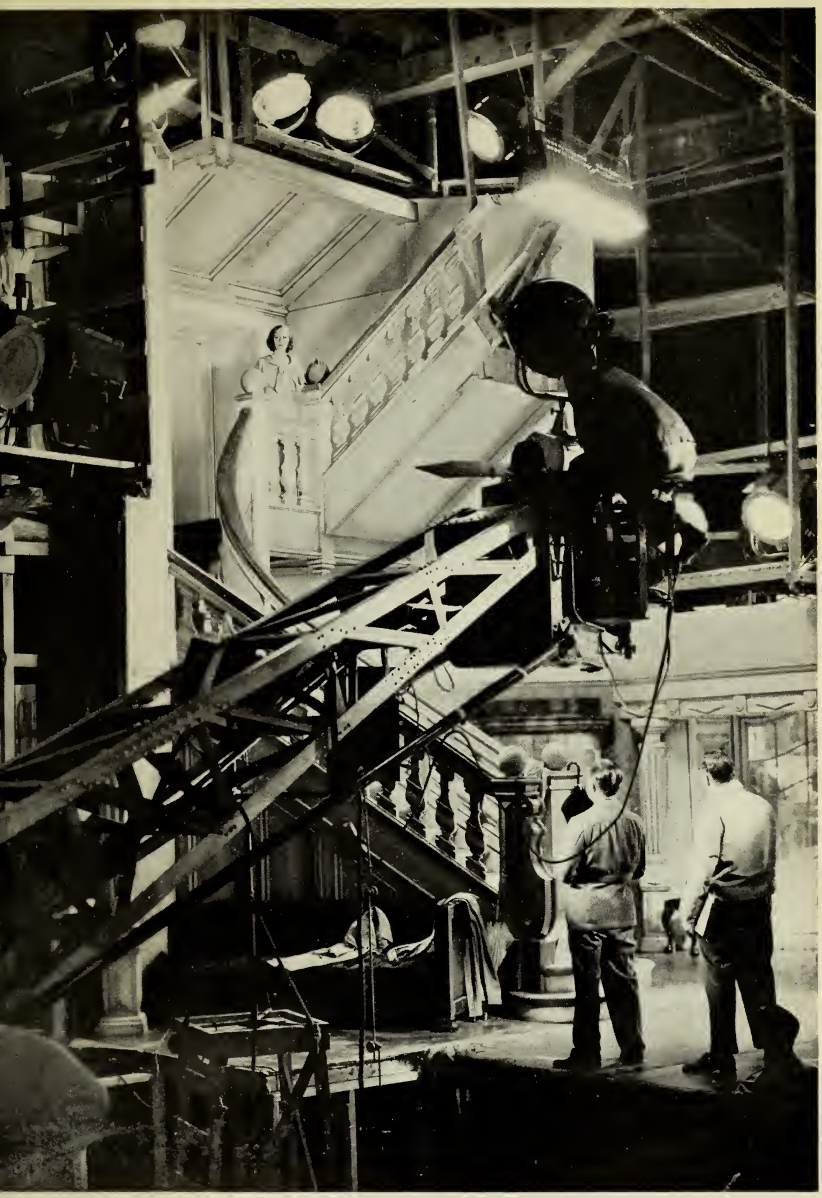
years ago, I am so familiar with the idea that I am beginning to be suspicious of it. The reason is not difficult to discover. There are perhaps half a dozen American directors who have such a distinctive way of doing their work that you could recognize it from seeing perhaps half a reel cut from the middle of a picture as you might distinguish the style of Walter Pater from the style of Charles Dickens after reading half a page. There are, in addition, at most a dozen directors who have made interesting pictures. In almost every case it is found that all of these directors have done four or five totally undistinguished works. Mr. Frank Capra did *Broadway Bill* the same year in which he did *It Happened One Night*; Mr. King Vidor has to his credit *The Big Parade*, *The Crowd*, *Street Scene*, *Our Daily Bread* and *So Red the Rose*. He is also the director of *The Patsy*, *Show People*, and *Not So Dumb*; Mr. W. S. Van Dyke has made comparatively few pictures and studied in two good schools—assisting Mr. Griffith on *Intolerance* and doing a series of Westerns with Tim McCoy. The question is whether his *Rose Marie* is as brilliant a work of direction as *The Thin Man*. Henry Hathaway, who made *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, also made *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. William A. Wellman made *Public Enemy* and also the deplorable *Call of the Wild*. Frank Lloyd made *Cavalcade* and *Mutiny on the Bounty* and also *A Passport to Hell* and *Hoopla*. Lewis Milestone directed *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Paris in Spring*. The man who made *Cimarron*, Wesley Ruggles, also directed *Bolero* and *College Humor*. The same John Ford who made *The Informer* and *Lost Patrol* made *Steamboat Round the Bend*. George Cukor, who directed *David Copperfield*, also directed *Rockabye* and *What Price Hollywood?* And, in addition, there are dozens of directors who have never made a single picture so good as to surprise us with the inferiority of most of their others. The suspicion roused by the astonishing contrast between top-notch and third-rate productions from the same hand is that ninety per cent of the greatness of the director rises from the excellence of his material.

It is a pity that one cannot be absolutely definite about directors. At best one can say that those mentioned above, and a few others, will probably be connected with better pictures than most other directors; this will be because having had successes and commanding high salaries, they can refuse second-rate stories, second-rate players, and second-rate productions.

This is not an absolute rule, but the chances are in its favour. The movie-goer needs, however, to be pretty definite in his own mind as to what he expects of a director.

In the old days of the movies, shooting scripts were not written out in great detail. If you found a particular shot recurring with variations in most of the pictures directed by one man, you might well guess that he had invented something which had proved satisfactory and was repeating it. I suspect that the close-up of inanimate objects (like the beans in the frying-pan in *The Birth of a Nation*) was such a favourite of D. W. Griffith. Mr. Reuben Mamoulian, who directed *Queen Christina*, seems to have a fondness for letting a roving camera come to rest on details of interior decoration. So you can pick a minute trick as being characteristic of most directors—but this is very deceptive. For instance, both Griffith and Lubitsch achieved fame in two kinds of movies, the great spectacle and the intimate drama; each is known chiefly for the later part of his work, Griffith for the spectacles and Lubitsch for the witty sexual comedy. A critic who knew nothing whatever of the histories of these directors would have a hard time identifying *Intolerance* and *The Avenging Conscience* as the work of the same director or *Dubarry* and *Trouble in Paradise* as coming from the same hand; but he would know that both men knew all that there was to be known of the art of direction when these pictures were made.

Let us say that a problem is set before a dozen different directors: How to express on the screen the idea that men working in modern factories are prisoners of the machine? One director might photograph a man behind a part of a machine which looks like prison bars; another might show the chained feet of prisoners and dissolve this into the feet of workmen moving at the same gait to punch the time clock; another might give you a flash of the agony of the prisoner's face and compare it with the agony of the workman's face; still another might frankly and brutally show prisoners and then labourers. But unless the director had invented the idea himself, it would be a fatal error to think that he is a social satirist; the only thing one really can judge is whether he has properly and effectively rendered whatever social satire lies in the idea. Ninety per cent of the judgments delivered on the quality of directors is really concerned with the thoughts and ideas presented ready-made for the directors to work on. When one says that Lubitsch



05 Richard Boleslavsky directing Greta Garbo in *The Painted Veil*, 1934

106 George Cukor directing Garbo and Robert Taylor in *Camille*, 1937

107 Lewis Milestone directing Joan Crawford in *Rain*, 1932

is a witty director, the essential truth of the statement lies in this: that he has been light-handed in dealing with witty material.

What, then, are the standards by which directors are to be judged? The director can make a good or a bad picture out of his material and therefore remains the most important single figure in the making of any picture; so the question we ask about him is a vital one. And the answer is that a director is to be judged by his capacity to communicate to us the ideas and the emotions of the picture. The director is responsible for the general *go* of a picture, for making it run off neatly, for controlling the speed of its various parts, for seeing that a romantic episode does not race along while a melodramatic conversation lags. He is, or ought to be, responsible for the interruptions of the main action of the picture so that a comic interlude is not placed too near to the climax of a tragic one, but only near enough to give more intensity to the emotion. He is responsible in taking a picture for giving such intonations and such emphasis as are most appropriate to the dialogue; he is, of course, responsible for the gesture and the facial expression and the gait and pace and movement of every actor on the screen, of the grouping and separations, and, in short, for everything they do. This is a far ideal. Stars often refuse to take direction if it does not harmonize with their own idea of the character they are playing, and their own idea of the character they are playing may often have nothing to do with that character as part of an entire picture.

A director may also be judged by the degree in which he fires the imagination. When the moving picture began to tell stories, it told them concisely, but it told them realistically as far as the camera was concerned. If a director wanted to show four or five idle women ruining their digestions by eating too many bon-bons, he showed precisely that on the screen; ten years later a candy box in which greedy hands were plunged was sufficient. When Van Dyke in 1934 wished to show a familiar event in the life of any man who walks a dog—an event which, although familiar, might not be passed by the censors—he merely showed the leash tightening and the hand of the man being jerked back; then the man stood still and a little later the same operation was repeated. This is the technique of the candy box over again and is still good. The part not only takes the place of the whole, but is more effective because the imagination of the spectator supplies what is missing. The

same technique is used to show both the passage of time and the rolling up of misfortunes, when we see the feet of a man walking, well shod at first, and on clean streets, and then dissolving into torn shoes along a noisome gutter. The director who invents new images for such things as these gets a quality of freshness and conviction which his rivals lack. And the inventions have to come rapidly. The man who first got the idea of letting the pages of a large calendar flutter off to indicate the passage of months may have been a pioneer; he was substituting physical movement for the sub-title, "Six months passed," and was therefore in the good moving-picture line. But the method is now hackneyed and all the variations on it have been played.

A director, using sight and sound, may now indicate the passage of time by dissolving the visual image and continuing the narrative as, for instance, a young law student saying, "I will never throw dust in jurymen's eyes," and then letting the scene fade into the same character on the bench as he utters the words, "Dust in your eyes, gentlemen."

These examples and a hundred others would indicate that one of the things a director always does is to play tricks with time. He foreshortens. He uses quick pictures to make the transitions between episodes, leaving himself time for the development of his major scene. The fatal error of many directors is that they seem not to know what their own major objective is, and play every episode for all it is worth, in humour or sentiment or excitement, without considering its relative importance to all that has gone before and all that comes after. Given a great comedian to play the porter in *Macbeth*, a director without a proper sense of proportion might make the knocking at the gate scene extremely funny and throw the whole central portion of the picture out of joint; given a free hand, any director of *Hamlet* would certainly show the scene which is only reported, of the battle between the privateer and the ship upon which Hamlet is being taken to England; but a good director would see to it that *Hamlet* on the screen was not chiefly memorable as a naval picture.

The two chief contributions of European directors to the technique of the moving pictures were camera angles from Germany and montage from Russia. Both of these were extravagantly praised by American critics, wearied by the monotony of American film methods, and although both

influenced the picture technique, neither became a fundamental part of the American method.

The camera angle is a way to emphasize the meaning of the object photographed by showing it in unusual perspective. Thus, the ordinary way of taking acrobats on a trapeze is by placing the camera in the position of the spectator at the circus; if you want to make the audience feel what the acrobat is feeling, when he is sailing through the air, you take the picture from the point of view of the flying acrobat. If you want to emphasize the importance of human beings in the lobby of a hotel, you photograph at one angle; if you want to emphasize the immensity of the lobby and the insignificance of the people, you photograph at another. The camera angle distorts because the human being is not accustomed to see things from various levels; in fact, the eye is so accustomed to the objects it knows that it rectifies distortions; a man lying down and looking up at a picture or at another human being, thinks that he sees the object exactly as he does when he is standing up. So the camera angle provides a shock—that is, it supercharges the scene with a new meaning. When this novelty first appeared, in America, it was used as a trick and was a nuisance. Merely to take a picture from an unusual angle when doing so does not concentrate any special meaning, is to break up the flow of the picture and to ruin the impression which the scene should give. The camera angle as a trick was as irritating as the full close-up—which was also used for emphasis until it was discovered that the close-up is so emphatic that it virtually puts an end to any scene in which it occurs.

A camera angle is in effect an intelligent development of trick photography. It still has its place and it will probably return to the screen in some new adaptation for good uses. It can set a scene more rapidly than the gradual approach of the panoramic camera, it can give the background for the action and it can express the point of view of the director. It was abused and prematurely dropped.

The other invention, montage, is much more important. It is a director's invention entirely in harmony with the inner nature of the moving picture. Before we come to the special meaning of montage attached to it by Eisenstein and Pudovkin, we should go back to the fundamental meaning and consider again such a simple moving-picture device as the rescue. The director takes all the scenes inside the fort—the weeping of the

women, the heroism of the men, the agony of the wounded and the desperate anxiety of all for the arrival of the rescuers. He also takes at another time and place the assembly of the rescuing troop, the ride through the forest; and, again, the fury of the besiegers and the detachment of a company to cut off the rescuers. On the stage, before the coming of the movies, these scenes had to be presented separately. The obvious advantages of the movies is that if necessary the screen could be divided and all the actions shown simultaneously. This makes for a cluttered screen and does not in truth exhaust the best possibilities of the movies, which not only can show events separated by space, but can create its own sense of time. So the moving picture slowly developed the method of showing the besieged, the besieger and the rescuer, one after the other, and again one after the other, perhaps in a different order, and again one after the other with shorter glimpses of each one as the climax approached and the three lines of movement coalesced. This arrangement of the separate episodes was made in the cutting room. It is a physical process by which so many feet of film, showing the rescuer, is pasted up after so many feet showing the besieged and so on until an effective arrangement is made. This is the simplest form of cutting, and although the later developments brought in new elements, the basic things are there. Like camera angles, cutting can be abused; if the relation of one part to another is not a natural one then the picture becomes jumpy and confused—very much like the early scenes of most Elizabethan or Restoration plays in which four or five unconnected actions seem to be going on; and, it may be said, very much like certain modern novels. The good system of cutting is cutting according to the meaning, according to the definite emotion which the picture must give; the delicacy of judgment is apparent. In the example I have used, suspense is the primary effect and the creation and intensification of suspense has to be accomplished by knowing precisely how many seconds of one scene may be used before the attention of the spectator will require the insertion of another. The director will have taken the three separate scenes each in such a *tempo* that the contrast between them will be effective; and the director will, from these three rhythms, create the major rhythm of that section of the picture. Not only the aesthetic success, but to a great degree the practical success of a moving picture depends on a proper combination of elements

108 Fritz Rasp in *The Loves of Jeanne Ney*, directed by G. W. Pabst, 1927

09 Emil Jannings in *The Last Laugh*, directed by F. W. Murnau, 1925

110 Conrad Veidt in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, directed by Robert Wiene, 1919

111 From Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*, 1935

as I have just outlined them. In *The Big Parade* there was a sequence composed almost entirely of bursting shells on a blank screen with once in a great while the appearance of soldiers running through No Man's Land; it was a perfect example of creating powerful emotions by rhythmic means.

Mr. Griffith, as I have said, believed that he derived the idea of parallel actions (which is the basis of cutting as I have discussed it so far) from the works of Charles Dickens. By 1915 in the *Birth of a Nation* he had delivered a perfect example of this type; a year later with *Intolerance* he developed the system in two directions. One might say that the entire picture was a demonstration of the art of cutting, because it was divided into four separate parts, four distinct episodes, and the principal players in each did not occur in any of the others. Balancing the parts of each of these and bringing them forward at the proper moment so that each came to its own conclusion and all contributed to the theme of the picture was the prime work of cutting—in this case imagined in advance by the director. Of course, within each of the episodes, parallel action and effective cutting also occur; but the second really significant development of the art is precisely at the opposite extreme from the general outline of the picture. When he began speeding up to a climax Griffith found that he did not want to let the spectator's eye rest for a minute on the pursuer and a minute on his victim; he shortened the time until flash after flash of separate objects—which Miss Iris Barry has very well called an "abrupt hail of images"—dazzled and even hurt the spectator. The actual figures in this case are startling. The reader is familiar with the appearance of a reel of film and knows that it is made up of separate pictures which are known as frames; in an ordinary picture he sees sixteen frames in a second in silent, twenty-four in talking pictures, and some of the flashes in *Intolerance* were only five frames long. As Miss Barry says, they hammered the sensibilities of the spectator, which was precisely what they were intended to do.

There is no reason to doubt that this development of cutting, which was not followed up in America, inspired both the theorists and the practical men of the Soviet cinema. There was—in a Communist society there was bound to be—an economic reason. Raw film was expensive in Soviet Russia and directors had to be economical. The Russians, moreover, were dealing with extremely simple people; to many of them

a moving picture was a great novelty. Vast numbers had never learned to read and all of them were living in a period of extreme confusion. All of these factors made it possible for film makers to develop a method which did not so much tell a story as create a series of impressions which built up and built up until the impressions alone could be trusted to put over the idea for which the film was made. They called the method "montage," and what struck the observer particularly was the speed with which one image cut in on another and the precision with which the directors chose their images for their effects. The obviousness of the material used might offend the pedantic. You see a boy in jail; you see his mother trying to slip him a note, you see the guard who prevents her. The guard looks away and you see what he sees: an insect trying to get out of a bowl of food. You see the mother again; you see the son again and then you see the guard flicking the insect back just as it is about to go free. You have a premonition about the escape of the prisoner which has been conveyed to you without anything definite, conveyed indirectly and symbolically—and therefore very effectively. The Russian directors were skilful in using a quick shot to refresh our minds about everything that had already passed in the picture. In *Ten Days That Shook The World* there was a scene of a drawbridge which opened suddenly so that a carriage hung on one side and a horse was left strangling in mid-air on the other. Eisenstein kept inserting quick shots of this harrowing scene at various intervals so that all the way through you remembered the beginning of the film. In *Potemkin* the most effective alternation of shots was on the steps in the city of Odessa. Those wide steps represented the solid power of the ancient order; a cripple takes his tortured way down these steps and by that action makes the steps hateful, as if they were animated by the spirit of injustice; there were flashes of soldiers with bayonets moving in orderly precision on these stairs and there was a baby carriage which banged and bounced its way down like a symbol of chaos.

The Russian directors cut in their semi-close-ups with skill and speed. They toppled the statues of czars and took shots of broken sceptres with crafty camera angles and cut these in among pictures of rioters or of revolutionaries sitting in counsel, and their method drove straight to the emotions. Pudovkin has said that "montage is an instrument of impression . . . a

112 The Russian Propaganda Film: *October, or Ten Days that Shook the World*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein, 1927

113 A Scene from *Potemkin*, directed in Russia by Sergei Eisenstein, 1925

114 A Scene from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed in Hollywood by Lewis Milestone, 1930

method that controls the psychological guidance of the spectator." The Russian directors guided their spectators to indignation over the old régime or enthusiasm for the new. But montage is not connected with revolutionary purposes. (The contrary is held by certain enthusiasts for both the Russian Revolution and the Soviet film; they find a Marxian element in montage and explain the indifference of Hollywood to this method on capitalist grounds; I cannot follow them there.) The Russians made some errors at the beginning by overplaying the montage system, by having too many scenes in which the images came too rapidly, and they neglected the long-run cutting in favour of the short. But there is no question that they had reverted to the basically correct principles of cutting for emotional effect which Griffith had developed and dozens of later directors had neglected.

When sound came to the movies, the Russian directors, because they were good theorists, were far ahead of the American. They knew that the thing seen and the thing heard do not have to follow the same line or carry the same tune, but that "sight images" and "sound images," so to speak, could be orchestrated. This is exactly what the first American directors of talking pictures did not know and have belatedly learned. The American director showed you a soprano singing a love song—sight and sound; the Russian director might give you a flash of the soprano and let the love song continue while the screen set before you the misery of the man who heard the love song and thought of a woman who had betrayed him. The Russians did not wish to let talk interfere with the basic principle of creating an impression through the montage of pictorial images.

Those not familiar with the Russian language are unable to say whether these theories have worked out. Certainly you cannot play tricks with dialogue as you can with pictures. For a moment, if you wish to present confusion, you may have half a dozen overlapping and intersecting conversations, but—to use again the example of the three elements in a rescue—the introduction of dialogue in the time limits of the flashes of action would leave you at the climax with "Oh, God"—"hold them"—"forward." Actually in action pictures dialogue drops away towards the climax and music, which is more amenable to montage, is substituted.

The coming of talk did lengthen out the sequences of a

picture—talk has to be realistic and cannot be too much abbreviated without sounding impressionistic to intellectuals and silly to people with common sense. The most notable defect of talking pictures at the present time is that the dialogue writers, trying valiantly to earn their money, impose too much conversation on the screen, and that directors have found no way to check it. It is not surprising that French critics hailed *Hallelujah*, an early Vidor talking picture, as a great triumph because it used *silence* effectively. The use of silence—that is, actually, of sound effects instead of dialogue—has been considerably developed since that time, but no one has yet found a method of speech which is as appropriate to the moving picture as blank verse is to heroic drama or recitative to opera.

When one considers that several hundred movies are made annually, it becomes obvious that more dialogue is produced in one year in Hollywood than on the stage in five years. There is simply not enough good dialogue to go round, and that, incidentally, is proof of the comparative insignificance of the writer's part in making moving pictures. Once the general plot has been given, almost any writer who can fit words together will do as well as the best of them. In fact, the best of them have an appalling habit of making a film dialogue unbearably literary. A fashion was set up several years ago of whimsical wisecracks. It came in when the movies were buying smart comedies from the stage. But writers who imagine that their part in a picture is extraordinarily important have taken the wisecracking and whimsicality into sewers and into the frozen Yukon.

One of the functions of the director is to save us from the writer enamoured of his own wit; another is to save us from the players enamoured of their own personality; and a third is to save us from the producers (those who finance the productions) who believe they know what the public wants. And all of this means that the function of the director is to understand the chief purpose of the picture he is making, and know what its total effect ought to be, and to see that all other effects, no matter how desirable in themselves, are made secondary to this one. When I noted before that good directors often do second-rate work when they have second-rate material, I should also have noted as an excuse for them that some of the material they get is so trivial and so meaningless that first-rate work with it is really impossible. All that a director can do with such pictures is be smart and smooth and glib and not make his picture a bore.

115 Charles Laughton as Javert in *Les Misérables*, 1934

116 From *Moana*, a Documentary Film directed by Robert Flaherty

9

THE bemused French journalist who, in 1895, was impressed by the earliest picture of the sea, because it was "so true," gave us an excellent hint about one of the virtues of the moving picture. We take the same pleasure in the movies that we take in a good likeness caught by the camera or by a painter. It is a rather complicated satisfaction because our minds are divided, and at the same instant we have to say: "This is exactly what happened" and "yet it is different." The great painter Picasso is fond of quoting an aphorism (of Pascal, I believe): "What a vanity is painting which excites our admiration by its resemblance to things, the originals of which we do not admire at all." There is a certain pride in our own cleverness when we see this resemblance and there is also the satisfaction of recognizing whatever is real. That is why scenic films or scientific, the travelogue and the newsreel, have so steadily held their place in universal esteem. After the artificialities and stupidities of one hundred thousand feature pictures, the newsreel came like a sea breeze at the end of a sultry day. The actual recording of events was put into the hands of men who were enterprising and athletic, but were not given to art. And that turned out to be a great advantage, because the newsreel remained simple and honest and only late in its career began to develop tricky angles and unusual shots.

The first stage of using actualities more substantially than in a travelogue actually created one of the classics of the silent film—*Nanook of the North*. Here was a story without a plot, or just enough to keep us interested in a character or two whose lives we would follow and who would show us the perils and the pleasures of life in the frozen North. There have been more adventurous pictures of actuality, of big-game hunting and battles under the sea, but the charm and simplicity of *Nanook* gave it a special appeal. Robert Flaherty, who made this picture, went afterwards to the South Seas and recently to the Aran Islands, doing similar work. In *Grass* Merrian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack presented a counterpart on the screen of de Quincey's *Flight of a Tartar Tribe*; in *Chang* they went

into the jungle and made a herd of elephants the hero. From time to time an exotic picture of this nature is still successful, yet the later ones were all elaborate; they were well financed and the investment was so great that, as a form of reinsurance, studios often tried to inject an element of fiction. Naturally the director and the camera-men took what was most picturesque and unusual, and none of these pictures could give us a factual record of day-to-day life which might turn out as dull as the day-to-day life of a suburbanite. The director selected the most effective ceremonies and natural phenomena. He concentrated on one supposedly typical central character. Yet these pictures did have one solid element of truth in them—for the most part the people were not trained actors and if they played at all before the camera, they played themselves, not press agents' ideals. This was a great relief after the studio productions, but this type of picture could not compete with the movie of straight fiction. It was interesting as an exception; it could not become the rule.[1]

In the past ten years, the moving picture has come to be used as an instrument of propaganda. Strictly speaking, it has always been so used, even unconsciously. A picture of the American Wild West was in a way an instigation to patriotism; so is any romantic historical picture in any country. The general theme in American pictures of the poor but honest young man, winning the hand of the rich young woman, was in a sense propaganda for the general social system in America. With the coming of dictatorships, studios have been under orders to make films defending or exalting a particular political group or economic system. Even in the direct historical pictures of the Russian Revolution, made under the Stalinite régime, the figure of Leon Trotsky, for instance, vanishes. The films which come nearest to being pure entertainment in both Fascist and Communist productions still carry direct propaganda for their respective theories. This is not at all surprising; the only surprising thing is that occasionally in capitalist countries the criticism of the existing order is rather definitely permitted. The danger here lies not in the story picture, but in the fact picture—particularly the newsreel.

[1] Two pictures of actuality are so memorable that they should be noted. One is the first Soviet picture of an ice-breaker and the other is the actual picture of the eruption of Krakatoa. The pictorial splendour of both these pictures has never been matched by studio shots.

Now the story picture has generally been recognized as fiction. Our palms may sweat with agony over the peril of the heroine and insidiously the morals and the manners of the moving-picture people may impress us, but after their first half-dozen movies, even little children suspect that they are not real—and reality of that sort is extraordinarily important to little children. But the newsreel has always had the special authority of being a record of actuality. Properly placed, the camera records the finish of a horse-race and its authority is unquestioned. We knew that in a brief shot of a bombing expedition in the War, we did not get the whole of the truth; but we believed, and until recently justifiably believed, that the newsreel was not faked. The newsreel is being faked now,[1] but its ancient authority still remains. That is why the newsreel may turn out to be a far more dangerous weapon of propaganda than the far more impressive feature picture.

The microphone, which added so much to the reality of the fiction picture, is oddly enough the villain in the piece for the newsreel. Except for a few special lamps to light up interiors, no unusual equipment was needed for taking a silent picture of any historical event. But for taking the event with its appropriate speeches or sound, the microphone has to be installed; there is a natural uncertainty about the recording—a speaker may hesitate, he may say something which he does not really wish to have permanently recorded, an interruption may occur—in short, it has been found preferable to rehearse certain events or, in other cases, to repeat them after the actual event has taken place, for the benefit of the camera and the microphone. There was a tiny unimportant instance of this a few years ago when President Roosevelt signed a bill in the presence of its legislative sponsors and members of the Cabinet. One of the latter was called away and the scene was re-enacted for the film in his absence. It happens that this particular instance was so reported in the Press, but it is easy to imagine a historian of the future going directly to the newsreel archives, picking up this brief shot and declaring on its authority that a certain Cabinet member was not present when the bill was signed. The spontaneous actuality of the newsreel virtually died out

[1] There seems to be no doubt that an unimportant episode in a newsreel of a strike in New England a few years ago was staged for the cameras; more recently testimony was offered before a committee of the Senate of the United States indicating that a private guard fired a tear-gas projectile at a striker and severely wounded him—entirely for the benefit of the newsreel camera-man. This is something more than faking, of course.

with the coming of the microphone, and, as this was unnoticed, the danger of intentional faking becomes all the greater. The miraculous news shots which still have an extraordinary power to move us are those which come unexpectedly, like the entire series of the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles.

The *March of Time* is so intelligently done that its part in breaking down the absolute authenticity of the newsreel should be most carefully noted. I do not mean that the editors of this pictorial review present anything that is false. As the *March of Time* has been called in the United States both Fascist and Communist, I think it unnecessary even to consider its political implications. But at the beginning, this series made popular the system of re-enacting past occurrences as background for current events. They asked individuals, for instance, to do again what they had done a year before, at a time when the importance of the act was not known and no picture was taken. The watchful spectator knew that the *March of Time* was not offering these portions of the episodes as direct newsreels—the *March of Time*, being in fact a news-magazine, would be pleased to separate itself entirely from the name of "newsreel." But the average spectator makes no fine distinctions. The average spectator still believes that the camera not only cannot lie, but cannot be used except in the direct service of actuality.

There is no great tradition of the impartial recording of news on the screen as there is in the Press. And even in the Press that tradition is breaking down. During a political campaign a newsreel organization which failed to give representation to both sides would find that the exhibitor was going elsewhere and perhaps making a composite newsreel to show in his theatre. That is to say, the public would require the appearance of rival candidates if only for the pleasure of hissing the enemy. But a newsreel proprietor who had also large investments in a motor-car factory might omit all pictures of accidents on the road and perhaps make a special showing of accidents in the air. A newsreel proprietor with intimate connections in another country could easily use perfectly accurate items to favour his friends and even to start up antagonism towards other nations. And if any protest came from the Government we should certainly hesitate to say that a newsreel should not be exhibited without the approval of a board of legal censors. In its present state of absolute freedom—which means in practice that those rich enough to make newsreels can without hindrance exhibit

117 *Nanook of the North*, directed by Robert Flaherty, 1920

118 *Man of Aran*, directed by Robert Flaherty, 1935

119, 120 News Shots : 1900 and 1937

whatever they choose to make—the newsreel can very steadily give a false *impression* without ever being held responsible for giving false *information.*

There is only one protection—the public must protect itself. On thousands of occasions, no doubt, patrons of movie-houses have asked the proprietor to show one film or have blamed him for showing another, but the newsreel has passed without comment. It is always brief and it is usually mildly interesting. But every patron of the movie who wishes to protect his own right to get uncoloured news should first of all protest to the theatre owner about any trickery in the newsreel. Theatre owners are remarkably sensitive to criticisms, especially if that criticism is backed by refusal to pay for undesired goods. And, in turn, the makers of newsreels are also sensitive to cancellations from the exhibitors. They may have propaganda to put over, but they are still interested in money.

Negative criticism is not enough. What is wanted is a positive demand that the producers issue and the exhibitors show impartial and *important* newsreels. The fatal tendency appears to make the newsreel innocuous, to avoid controversial subjects, to omit certain figures. In districts of New York City largely populated by Germans and Jews, it is considered unsafe to show pictures of Adolf Hitler, and there is every likelihood that such a showing would lead to riots in the audience. The audience becomes thereby a greater menace to freedom of communication than the newsreel producer. The fanatic on each side would be delighted to see propaganda pictures in his own favour, but is unwilling to allow factual pictures to be shown which do not attack the other side. It is undoubtedly true that newsreels of extraordinary social value are made and filed away; the spectator should learn to demand that they be shown—and should also learn to tolerate them.

There is a special reason for being interested in the non-fiction or documentary film. In the first place, it avoids all of the faults of the studio film: the unimportant story, the general atmosphere of falseness, the bad acting, the overload of richness and luxury and, to a great extent, the sacrifice of all other qualities to the necessity for making money. (I do not mean these words to be a blanket indictment of all studio pictures; but when studio pictures are bad, these are the chief faults.) The documentary also avoids the virtues of the studio picture; often the good story, the good acting, the good direction, and

the very rare intelligence and fine sensibility of the studio picture need for contrast on a good programme the virtues which the documentary film possesses. The virtues of documentary are: a wider range of interest; people and places not adaptable to the ordinary studio production; actuality, and so on. Moreover, a study of this field suggests that in the documentary film Europe may produce a rival to the studio film of America without going through the agonies of attempting to surpass American producers in their own field. In Paul Rotha's book, *Documentary Film*, by far the most intelligent and complete discussion of the subject, there is a list of directors of documentaries. It has thirty-five names; they are Russian, French, German, English, Dutch, Belgian and Bohemian. There is only one American among them, Robert Flaherty, and his last work under American auspices is dated 1931.[1]

Looking over the subjects of the great documentary films another extremely important point occurs: their interest is collective, not individual. Here are camera reports on a district of Paris, an explanation of the dial telephone, a trek across the Sahara, the reclamation of the Zuider Zee, a survey of the coast of Labrador, and the history of the Russian Revolution—even the record of life in a monastery. Possibly every one of these could be transformed into a personal narrative if Hollywood chose to use the material as background; here they are treated not as background. The machinery and the way people live are made the essential things in the picture. One does not need to be prophetic about the future to understand how important this is. Collective enterprise is the prime phenomenon of modern times, the basic fact of the existence of millions of people under Communism or Fascism, and collective action in nations with powerful co-operative movements adds other millions. And this phenomenon has been entirely neglected not only by Hollywood, but by all of those producers outside of Hollywood who are attempting to rival its output.

[1] This is not quite fair to the maker of American non-fiction films, and I quoted it only to indicate in what low esteem the American workers in this field are held abroad. The editors of the *March of Time*, of course, are entitled to a position; Mr. Ralph Steiner has slowly mastered a technique which he began as purely photography and has worked into cinematography. For the Government, Pare Lorenz has made an interesting documentary on the subject of soil conservation called *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. From time to time good documentary films are made in America, but in spite of the appearance of several short pictures, the arrivals are very limited. It should be remembered that even for the undeniably popular *Three Little Pigs*, Disney received less than fifty thousand dollars.

121 The Grand Manner in 1916. A Scene from William Fox's *A Daughter of the Gods*

122 Pola Negri in *Hotel Imperial*, directed by Moritz Stiller, 1926

123 Gloria Swanson in *Sadie Thompson*, 1927

10

In the minds of the diehards, the coming of talk to the movies is the end of the moving-picture art; to the average intelligent person talk has made the moving pictures seem mature. We may leave them to quarrel and consider the coming of talk as a dramatic and ironic and amusing incident in the real-estate speculations of the motion-picture producers.

The degree to which real estate has affected the art of the movies has hardly been guessed. The settings in which the movies were shown originally were, to say the least, undignified. As a free attraction in French cafés, as the least interesting number in a vaudeville programme, ranking below the good side-shows at circuses or country fairs, and finally arriving at a home of its own in dark, uncomfortable, narrow, ill-ventilated little halls—the moving picture was free from the taint of respectability. But when it began to make money, the exhibitors could offer cleaner and better theatres and could make money out of larger ones. The steps on the road from the nickelodeon to the moving-picture palace were rapidly taken.

Then, unfortunately, the producers of moving-picture houses decided it was a mistake to let anyone except themselves make any money in any part of the moving-picture business. They provided for themselves a nobler sounding motive—to make sure that their pictures were displayed in conditions which the new art of the cinema really merited; but in truth, it was good business to establish a chain of houses all over the country. Into these houses a company like Paramount could book its pictures without fear that an exhibitor might prefer a Fox or a Goldwyn picture on that particular week. Moreover, when the great business of presentations began—virtually a small musical show with jazz band, dancers and other specialty acts —a company owning a dozen or a hundred houses could create a unit, as it was called, and send this out for perhaps half a year as a theatrical troupe might go. The tied houses usually bore the name of the company, and as they were usually the most comfortable, they created favourable publicity.

The reverse of this process also happened. Marcus Loew

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owned theatres; in order to escape from the absolute domination of the moving-picture producers who could either force him to take second-rate films or refuse to let him have first-rate ones, he entered the moving-picture business himself.

The moment the producer and the movie-house were connected, the producer felt obliged to produce at least fifty-two major features for that house in the course of a year. (There are only three or four cities in which pictures run more than one week and there are many which prefer to change twice a week.) Here you have the magnetic effect of real estate; the buildings forced the studios to speed up their production. Later on, when movie-houses began to run two complete features on a single programme, the business of making second-rate pictures was standardized; but even at the beginning, when the companies increased their production, they began to make inferior pictures. They made pictures on schedule determined by the necessities of the theatres; they could not afford time for retakes and improvements. I have heard of pictures which were actually shipped from the West Coast to New York without having been seen in their final state by the producers.

There were advantages in the real-estate operations of the moving-picture producers—the comfort and luxury of the great houses somehow added to the respectability of the pictures themselves. If the product had really been intelligently handled, if the work of one studio had a special character not to be found in another, then going to a Paramount or Fox theatre would have meant something useful to the average spectator. But on the whole it was a bad business. The few big companies had a sort of monopoly of the splendid side of movie presentation and the real-estate ventures were among the things which dragged the movies down after the stock-market crash of 1929.

One company had not been able to buy up many houses—the Warner Brothers. The Warners (four of them to begin with) gave up a bicycle shop in 1903 to open a moving-picture house in the small town of Newcastle, Pennsylvania. Presently they began to operate a film exchange. They went into the business of producing and were more or less frozen out, but they got hold of Ambassador Gerard's *My Four Years in Germany*, rushed it into production and, on the wave of patriotism during America's first war year, collected enough profit to start production again. They were, however, definitely

124 Shell Fire effects for *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 1930.
Notice Sound Truck in Foreground

125 The Ships used in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, directed by Frank Lloyd, 1935

126 The Famous Fox Liner at Movietone City, used in many film

in the second rank of producers in the beginning of the 1920's and it was then that the other producers were making their great purchases of theatres and real estate. The Warner Brothers had to sell their pictures where they could, for whatever price they could get. They were not, however, without resources. The famous dog Rin-Tin-Tin worked for them and it is said kept them solvent for a considerable time. It was the distinction of Mr. John Barrymore that he also helped stave off bankruptcy for the Warners. But in the late 1920's the situation was definitely displeasing. It did not seem possible that, in the flood tide of a great American boom, they could put down Paramount, First National, Fox and Universal and Metro. These were the dominant companies and the three largest had almost a monopoly of the fancier types of exploitation in the big cities. The cost of making impressive pictures was now very high and the big companies were getting most of the receipts. The Warner Brothers were approaching the rocks.

So naturally it was not to them, but to the great men of the big powerful studios that the manufacturer of the sound apparatus made the first offers. And these great business men, confident that no one could show them anything of importance, turned it down. Perhaps some of them knew that the combination of voice and movement had been made long ago; but the Bourbons of the moving picture are as prone to forget as they are unwilling to learn. They brushed aside the talking mechanism because they did not need it, because they did not think it would work, and did not feel under any obligation to give it a test. But most of all they threw it aside because they are making millions, which is their permanent reason for not trying anything.

So the invention was offered to the Warners, and Samuel Warner was desperate enough to try anything. The moving pictures are such a mixture of secret manœuvres and false publicity that right before your eyes an event slips into a legend out of which is it hard to disengage a germ of truth. In Hollywood the legend is current that even after the success of the first pictures which were part silent and part in sound, the producers were still so sceptical that an enthusiastic director secretly made an all-talking picture and, when he confessed what he had done, was to be fired for wasting the company's substance, but finally persuaded the producers to come and

listen to it. It is not a legend, however, that sound, which in all probability saved the entire moving-picture industry from going bankrupt, was rejected when it was offered and for a few months was even considered a passing fad by the hard-headed business men who will not listen to theorists about the movies. However, the facts carry their own moral. By following the dates, one learns that sound-on-film had been demonstrated in 1923 and that the first commercially shown moving picture in which sound was synchronized with movement used discs for recording the sound and appeared in August of 1926 —it was Warners' *Don Juan*. In the next year they led off with the first dialogue film, *The Jazz Singer*, while Fox used sound-on-film in the Movietone. And the third year Warners again led off with the first all-talking picture, *The Lights of New York*. By the end of 1929, Warners had taken over First National and had reached a position of equality with Fox and Zukor of Paramount. The Warner Brothers who had been almost frozen out of the big movie-houses had rendered obsolete the big movie-houses, unless they provided themselves with the equipment which the Warner Brothers' enterprise had forced on them.

The turning-point as between silent and talking film was without question *The Jazz Singer*—fundamentally a musical movie with a feeble plot. French critics have called the idea behind this film "the most disastrous and most monstrous, the most destructive for the art of the movies"—but they exaggerated because once the movie could talk, it was bound sooner or later to sing. The important thing about *The Jazz Singer* is that its success gave rise to dozens of ill-conceived, unimaginative, repetitious, sentimental pictures and that for a long time the "back-stage musical" was the only kind of picture on which the producers lavished the money they were making and whatever intelligence they had. Yet almost at the beginning one good musical picture did occur, *Broadway Melody*. It was unique because it was not a photographed reproduction of a stage show with the original stage dialogue added—as most of the talking pictures were in the first few years. *Broadway Melody* was not only an excellent picture, but was enormously successful. For four years all of the talking pictures which grossed more than two million dollars were musical shows.

There would be very little point in rehearsing now the mistakes of the early talking pictures. Mechanically the progress towards almost perfect recording was rapid; the little problems

of synchronization were soon solved so that the dog did not speak to the man and bass voices were not attached to treble children. But two errors the movies made which did hold back their progress. First, they made the camera the slave of the microphone. The microphone at that time was virtually in a fixed position and the camera was mobile, but the directors were apparently so excited by the novelty of sound that they forgot the first principle which is that a moving picture must move. Because a character was speaking, they turned the camera upon his throat so that dialogue in the movies became an almost anatomical performance. The next mistake was trying to tell their stories in dialogue instead of in action. In both cases the moving picture was abandoned and the stage captured the screen. The first of these errors was corrected in about three years—that is, some two years after it was pointed out by critics of the new art of the talking pictures. (It takes about two years for producers to understand what the critics of the pictures are talking about.) The second error persisted for a longer time and one still meets it, particularly in classic or historical films and in films made in England. I do not say English films; that would be too limited; it is an odd circumstance that films made in England even by American directors and players suffer from the same faults as the native productions.

The reader may not believe me when I say that producers are still trying to make pictures without the camera. I refer them as a typical example to the work of one of the best American directors, Mr. Frank Capra, who knows how to launch his pictures neatly and to keep them moving with plenty of go to their climax. Towards the end of *Lost Horizon*, Mr. Capra presented four men in a London club—four men never before seen on the screen—and one of these four told the story he had heard of the adventures of the film's hero from the moment we had lost sight of him—adventures so much more interesting than those we had actually seen that we felt the wrong picture had been made. The basic advantage of the screen over the stage is that the screen does not need a Greek messenger to come in and report what has happened; it can show us what has happened. This was completely lost because Mr. Capra felt that a well-spoken narrative would cover a lapse of time equally well. And this is not a solitary example, although it is a particularly conspicuous one. With half a dozen

exceptions every moving picture one sees is slowed down and made soft in spots by the superfluous use of dialogue and the misuse of motion.

Yet the moving pictures were lucky. Radio was just coming in and making the people accustomed to mechanical sound—one might say to mechanical sound without much meaning. By 1930 when the changeover to the talking picture was virtually complete and the typical dramatic feature picture had been developed, radio had also established its formula. In the dramatic or comic sketches radio devoted about fifteen minutes to the elaboration of such a trifling action as the movies would show in perhaps a minute and a half. The most famous perhaps of all the actions of the air at that time was the suit for breach of promise in the radio programme known as *Amos 'n' Andy*, and this was discussed for fifteen minutes a day, six days a week, for several months. So, by contrast with its rival entertainment, the moving pictures seemed quite fast; in the time of four radio broadcasts, which would hardly advance an incident beyond its starting-point, the movies would have had half a dozen episodes, at least as many comic incidents, and the development of one major plot and one secondary plot to some sort of a climax and satisfactory conclusion.

It may also be counted lucky for the movies that talk came in and destroyed two-thirds of the stars. It was sad, but a great many of them had outlived their usefulness; the particular lot of gestures and grimaces they made were no longer effective. The movies had done very little of the first order in the last years of their silent lives; they had broken no new ground; they repeated themselves, sometimes with improvements, sometimes only with variations, but the American movie in particular was becoming commonplace. It was not flexible enough even to get the advantage of the German camera angles and the Russian system of cutting. The Warner Brothers who started the talkies may have been near financial bankruptcy, but most of the other producers were much closer to intellectual failure. The talkies made them spend a great deal of money, but they brought new intelligence and new life into the moving-picture business, and what must be of the first importance, the novelty of the talking picture also kept the audience coming in to see the movies. It is well known that in the bad days of the depression attendance at the picture houses fell, and all kinds of tricks were played to keep people coming to the movies—two good features were

127 *Folies Bergères*, 1934

128 *Whoopee*, 1930

Musicals

129 Musicals: *Footlight Parade*, 1933

offered and with them a complete set of china, of a sort, to each patron (but only one piece at each performance, of course); later a system of prizes running as high as fifteen hundred dollars were offered through a gambling device or lottery known as Screeno or Bank Night. These extravagant attractions had to be added even after the vast attraction of talking moving pictures had been exploited. Can anyone doubt that if the pictures had remained silent, multitudes would have remained home and listened to the newer and very energetic entertainment offered by the radio, leaving the moving picture to become bankrupt or the toy and pleasure of the few.

Among the things destroyed by the talking picture were the art of pantomime, the quickie, and the aesthetic, non-realistic picture as made by small groups of cinema aesthetes. Destruction of the quickies was not absolute, but the cost of making a cheap talking picture was so much greater than the cost of making a cheap silent one that for a long time the independent producer was completely stopped. An inventive director like Sternberg made the silent *Salvation Hunters* for a few thousand dollars and, although it was not a success, it caught the attention of those who could effectively study its lessons and so had an influence on other pictures; half a dozen players, working a few days in a rented studio and the rest of the time along the street, on the docks, made the central action of such a picture. The streets and the people, the parks with their decrepit types, were all there for the taking. But sound equipment pulled ninety per cent of the picture into the studio, and streets had to be built and extras had to be hired and there was a royalty to pay for the microphone and all the other mechanisms that went with it. The business of making pictures became therefore more centralized; it was, in fact, only when the central authorities collapsed—because their finances were not in good order, because their real-estate ventures were unfortunate, because their stocks went down in the universal crash of the early 1930's—that the business of producing was divided. Producers raised money enough for one picture and agreed to release the picture through a major corporation; were allowed to make the film on that corporation's lot; and if they were successful, became semi-independent, keeping a small staff—usually a director, a scenario writer, a few players—more or less as a permanent unit and making three or four pictures a

year. Or, in the case of the very large companies, one producer would take responsibility for two or three stars under contract and produce their pictures, not interfering with others. So William Le Baron, for instance, was the producer of Mae West and W. C. Fields; so Pandro Berman did the Astaire pictures and those of Miss Hepburn. So the late Irving Thalberg, perhaps the most brilliant of all the producers, was in charge of production for M.-G.-M., but himself worked especially on pictures done by his wife, Norma Shearer, and on certain other exceptional productions. It is still difficult for a completely independent man to make productions, but the whole tendency is to provide more latitude. Among other things, about a dozen directors have become so important that they have become virtually their own producers.

In a way the ascendancy of the director is one of the benefits brought about by talk in the movies. After Griffith and Ince, the American directors lost ground; the names which made themselves known are Lubitsch, von Stroheim, Murnau, Dupont. Very slowly the names of John Ford and King Vidor began to be heard; the Capras, Van Dykes and Wellmans, who were to put their mark on the movies of the 1930's, although they were at work in the silent days, were not known. Few people imagined that the director was of any importance. When Chaplin made *A Woman of Paris* as producer and director, it was considered an idiosyncrasy—almost as if he had chosen to do menial labour—he was having his little joke. (He actually had his little joke by appearing in the film for a few seconds as a porter, and is not frequently recognized.) The fact that Chaplin directed his own pictures and cut them and made them a unified whole from the moment of conceiving the theme to the moment of showing the finished work on the screen—this was never considered significant, excepting by a few critics.

The directors were slow enough in learning the correct use of the microphone in connection with the camera, but they were technically expert men, they were not *prima donnas*, and they learned much faster than the stars. Or put it this way: they were willing to learn. The stars clung to the methods of silence long after they were compelled to talk, and it was clear that while some of them could speak they had almost no conception of what the sense was. Dialogue of the early talking pictures rose not far above the level of *Bulldog Drummond* and

Grand Hotel, but for most players these conversations were too intricate and too mysterious. They might convey the sounds, but they had no way of conveying the emotion. If they had been great pantomimists like Chaplin, one could understand that the necessity of timing expression and gesture to go with the spoken word would have been disturbing. Actually most of the players who vanished from the screen were not even good mimes. The only tragedy is that of the few who were good players, but whose voices were not agreeable as they issued from the sound track.

The disappearance of pantomime is almost complete and could be taken philosophically if any proper system of acting or playing had been developed in its place. Actually pantomime as a great art is practised by a very small number of players. Chaplin and W. C. Fields are in the first line, of course, and Emil Jannings in his better pictures; Alla Nazimova, Garbo, but not always, and a few others in a more serious vein. The rest had created a kind of mixed system of playing, partly pantomime, partly stage acting, and partly a series of conventional movements which the screen had developed and which when properly done were extremely effective. The first and third of these disappeared and stage acting became very important in the movies; players from the New York stage were hastily imported into Hollywood because they could talk and because they seemed to be able to give the impression of being ladies and gentlemen while they talked.

The moving picture ran into an extraordinary situation: as soon as the characters on the screen began to speak, they appeared to be infinitely more intelligent than they had been as silent shadows and for some strange reason they appeared to live in an atmosphere more correct, even more exalted, than the silent characters had enjoyed. It is hardly worth trying to discover why the moving-picture people thought so. They were simply going high-hat; in a way preparing to revenge themselves for the ancient snobbery of the stage for the pictures. The result, however, was that the system of stage acting which had been driven out of the movies since about 1920 began to impose itself. This time the stage did better than it had done in the days of Famous Players. At least half a dozen of the front-rank players of Hollywood come from the stage and they range from Fred Astaire to Claudette Colbert, from Marie Dressler to Clark Gable.

I have said that the aesthetic movie was one of the victims of the coming of talk, but this does not mean that the art of the moving picture was destroyed.

The average movie enthusiast shies away from any picture which is definitely called an art film. A picture which is called an artistic triumph does not offend him because an artistic triumph may still be a good movie; but experience with art films has shows that they are either foreign, obscure or dull. It is rather a pity that the average man is probably right. The artistic triumphs include the work of Eisenstein, Griffith, René Clair, Disney and Korda; the art films are the work chiefly of literary men and painters who have not been able to make good movies, but have wanted to produce great art.

And yet these amateurs have occasionally hit upon something extremely important. If they had not been so pedantic, they might have had an actual influence on the course of the movies, and a good one. They discovered, for instance, that two of the chief drawbacks of the motion picture around 1920 were the stories and the actors. They were quite right, but instead of improving these two elements, they decided that truly artistic film would have no story and no actors. They agreed with the proposition which is as fundamental to the movies as the proposition about a straight line is to the geometry of Euclid: the movies are based on movement; so they showed us straw hats or geometrical figures moving. They took these objects at various angles or through distorting crystals. They used change of speed and quick contrasts—they gave us the essence of movement, and once in a great while a happy find in the way of an image or combination of rhythms was definitely pleasurable. For the rest, only the scientist could be interested in these diagrams or demonstrations of the refined essence of the moving picture.

Later, when Dada had been transmuted into Surréalism, we had films of the unconscious. They were Freudian symbols on the screen; they were highly imaginative and if the imagination was not what we call normal, it was at least powerful. The film, *Sang d'un Poète*, on which the celebrated Jean Cocteau worked, was one of the most famous of these. Its great fault was an overpowering dullness. No film which was technically and aesthetically a good movie could be quite so dull even if the producers were deliberately attempting to mystify the spectators.

There were art films in which all action came to a standstill; there were films called high art because they used the close-up —the chief unmoving defect of the usual film—instead of the mobile human body; there were art films which attempted by photography of strange compositions to create a mood. But essentially there seems to have been only one art film which was conceived at least in part as a movie, the famous *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. This picture did not have a great influence on Hollywood or on any of the other centres of production; but it did have a profound effect on the intellectuals who were just beginning to discover the possibilities of the movies, and it is probably fair to say that this picture deepened for ten years the gulf which separated the intelligent critic from the practical producer.

It is almost impossible to convey to those who did not see this picture when it first was shown the astonishing and almost catastrophic effect which it had. It was made in Germany in 1919 and was instantly appreciated in France, but made its way more slowly in England and America. It is one of the few pictures which I have ever heard hissed—not for political, but for aesthetic, reasons.

The reason is that *Caligari* was two things: an extremely well-made fantastic melodrama and a moving picture in which real people acted as if they were drawings by Goya or often enough by George Grosz. It was a story of a somnambulist sent out by his master to commit murder—and it turns out at the end that the whole story is the wild imagination of a lunatic. Until the picture straightens itself out at the end, and we know that we have been watching a madman's dream, the whole thing is remarkably unnerving. The action seems to take place in the Middle Ages, but the streets are too distorted, the sunlight seems never to fall in the right spot and everything is eccentric and runs off at a tangent from anything we have ever known. Part of this effect was given by the use of painted backdrops; the sense of unreality was perfectly conveyed. At the same time certain staple movie elements were very well used. There was plenty of action, including a chase over the roof-tops and the principal players, Werner Krauss and Conrad Veidt, were almost entirely cinematic—you had no feeling that they would have done anything the same way if they were playing *Caligari* on the stage.

The fact is that *Caligari* tried to do too much. It was influenced

by those Expressionists in Germany who called themselves Der Sturm. The painted backdrops were, after all, stage settings; there were dozens of incidents, hundreds of images of which the meaning was clear to those who had followed the Expressionist movement, but were otherwise obscure; there were moments when what happened on the screen was a marvellous painting but not a good movie. The English critic C. A. Lejeune says that *Caligari* "startled two continents out of their peace of mind" and believes that "*Caligari* was to set production moving rapidly in Europe and America . . . towards a cinema of some individuality, a certain measure of fantasy and design." This may be true, but in the ten years following the showing of *Caligari* in America I was not able to discover that any American director had seen it. Possibly the foreign directors who then were invading America were affected by this picture.

In any case, we have here a movie which definitely did not try to be a realistic photograph. The average American production pretended above all to be real. The workman's cottage —whenever the movies forgot themselves so far as to deal with the lives of the humble—might be built on the scale of a palace, but the serious movie always pretended that the motives and manners of the people it exploited were faithful representations of the real thing. The more the movie falsified the real truth about the *relations* of human beings, the more it tried to make their clothes and motor-cars and silverware appear genuine. There was hardly a trace of imagination, hardly a trace of fantasy in the ordinary feature film of the time. Even the comedians were not imaginative. If Harold Lloyd hung from the hands of a clock fifty stories above the street, the fun came from the possibility that he really was in that predicament; Buster Keaton was not quite so realistic; and only Chaplin demanded, from the moment his pictures began, that the spectator should transport himself into the world of unreality. The real triumph of the fantastic was to come many years later and oddly enough the comedians who did talk, the Marx Brothers, had more of fantasy than the silent ones, who might have learned the one good lesson of *Caligari*, had ever had.

130 Musicals: Eleanor Powell in *Born to Dance*, 1936

131 Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in *Top Hat*, 1935

11

The reader may be surprised to learn that the time of day at which he chooses to go to the movies has had a profound effect upon the movies themselves. There are several ways of showing pictures. In villages and quite small towns, pictures are often shown in the evening only—once, let us say, at about seven, for the benefit of the younger children, and again a little after nine o'clock. In larger towns and the neighbourhood theatres of great cities, the performances begin sometime in the afternoon and continue until quite late in the evening without any break. And by exception certain other expensive pictures are put on as if they were plays with a single matinée and a single evening performance at fixed times and with very high prices. By far the great majority go to the movies as shown in the second category. Intelligent exhibitors discover at what time they may expect the greater number of their patrons and try to arrange the programme so that the feature picture will begin after the theatre is wellnigh full. Nevertheless, vast numbers of people are in the habit of going to the movies not at a fixed time, but whenever they have nothing else to do; they are in the habit of entering a movie-house without asking or caring what point the programme has reached. They go in and, for an hour and a half or more, they look and listen to the pictures, sometimes gratified, sometimes indifferent; at moments they are more interested in what they see than what they hear, at moments the other way round.

These circumstances suggest that the moving picture by its nature can be shown, first to a large number of people, second to people not particularly interested in it, and third with a musical accompaniment.

The first point explains itself. The invention of type multiplied the possible number of readers of books and general education began. The mechanical setting of type multiplied the original multiplication by an almost incalculable coefficient and universal education followed. Whatever is capable of being generally appreciated by multitudes of people will not long remain the property of the few, although the few will

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protest against the vulgarization of a rare and sacred art. (Collectors hate reproductions of great pictures, no matter how fine they are.) The moving-picture projector is a machine-gun compared to a muzzle loader. You do not use a machine-gun, unless you are a Chicago gangster, to shoot down one man.

The second point brings us to one of the extraordinary paradoxes of the moving picture. The contemporary movie lives—according to the producers—because it is the most effective way of telling a story. And yet in all the big cities of the world vast crowds of people come into the moving-picture houses when the feature is half over; they come in during a mystery film just as the villain is being arrested; they sit and wait for the same picture to begin, and leave when it passes the point where they came in. This is definitely something new. Even the most misguided of readers does not start with the last chapter of a mystery story; the reader may skip, but he usually skips consecutively. Even in reading a novel a second time, we more or less read it from the beginning towards the end; no matter how great our interest is in the characters, we want to see these characters unfold in their natural order. No one would dream of going to a play and arriving in the middle of the second act. That is reserved for those who go to the opera and either go for purely social purposes or to hear an admired voice. The purists are shocked at the thought of going in to hear the last two movements of a symphony, insisting that the total effect is ruined unless all the parts are heard; but even if you are not a purist and happen by accident to come in for a *scherzo* and a triumphant finale of a symphony, you would feel that the lament of the andánte should certainly not be played after. Yet only the true purist or pedant of the cinema will refuse to take his chance by coming in at whatever point a film has reached, and in most cases there is no feeling of the inappropriate when half an hour later you see the beginning of a picture, the end of which is already perfectly known to you.

This perhaps more conclusively than anything else proves what was said before—that the story is not the first element of interest in the movies. It may even prove too much because it casts doubt on the importance even of character. It shows incontestably that there is something in the moving picture which does not exist in the other arts and which makes it possible for us to see the movie in this extraordinary jumble

of the middle and the end before the beginning. That element, of course, is the cinematic, the movement itself.

A good moving picture is deliberately or instinctively made in such a way that every ten minutes or so the general theme is clarified. Except in the special case of a mystery picture, it does not carry over any obscurities of plot or any great complexities of character necessary to understand what follows. Pictures are made so that they can be followed with more or less pleasure by a spectator who arrives at almost any time in the course of the projection. And this grows from the original make-up of the moving-picture theatre's programme. At the beginning, every episode shown was brief—a matter of two or three or at the most five minutes. The first picture that ran an entire reel, approaching fifteen minutes, was considered a dangerous innovation. Very slowly the common average length of the current feature picture was developed and single reelers kept right on side by side with the longer features. (In comedy it should be noted that the long feature was very slow to develop. Chaplin appeared in *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, but scurried back to one-reelers, and this remained the dominant form for many years and, in fact, still is—only the exceptional stars appearing in full-length comedies. There is a rumour that Walt Disney will make long comedies exclusively, but it would be a fair guess that he will change his mind.)

The spectator, wandering into the middle of a performance in the movie-houses of an early day, found himself perhaps half-way through an instalment of a serial, no other part of which he had ever seen. There is no proof, but I should venture to guess that he enjoyed it almost as much as he enjoyed the following film, which may have been a complete one-reel adaptation of *Vanity Fair* or *Romeo and Juliet*.[1] This fragmentation of the moving-picture programme established that easy-going tradition of dropping in at a movie-house casually to pass three-quarters of an hour between appointments or to get out of the rain, the little movie-houses taking the place in American cities of the sidewalk café in Paris. There was also an economic reason. The cost was low.

The movies made money, and the development of full-length and even over-length pictures naturally followed. The business

[1] The latter incidentally ran nine hundred and fifteen feet in the version made by Vitagraph in 1908. Three years later it was made in two reels by another company and in 1913 Pathé made it in colour, but there seems to be some doubt whether this two-reeler was ever released.

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of showing pictures became a profitable one in itself and astute real-estate men financed the building of moving-picture houses which were not converted shops (or theatres whose sight lines were based on the old aristocratic principle that those who pay less for admission are not entitled to see much of what is going on). Still the moving picture was exhibited more or less for itself. It had withdrawn from its position as the last number on a vaudeville show, where it served the excellent purpose of chasing out the customers, and releasing their seats for newcomers. The good moving-picture programme was composed entirely of moving pictures.

Yet there was always one other element. When Edison was looking for something to go with the phonograph, his instinct was correct, but he had reversed his proportions. Music was to go with the movies and not vice versa. Right from the beginning, the silence of the screen—on which horses galloped and doors slammed and guns were fired—seemed unearthly. It is a fair guess that, if the idea of a musical accompaniment had not instantly come to the producers, the moving pictures would have been delayed for a generation—possibly there never would have been silent movies at all and we should have had to wait for dialogue pictures. A piano, usually out of tune, played by anyone who had mastered the simple rhythms of current ragtime, provided the first accompaniment. Very early, producing companies suggested appropriate music to be played at various points. The pianist broke into *Alexander's Ragtime Band* whenever he saw musicians on the screen and played *Where Did You Get That Hat?* to ridicule the villain's topper. In France, at a later period, the combination of movies and music was effected in another way which may be called the triumph of French logic. If the general tone of a film seemed to harmonize with the general tone of one or two movements of a symphony, these movements were played straight through and any temporary discrepancy had to take its own chance. It was rather startling at times to hear César Franck as an accompaniment to a film of railroad life, but the spectator who did not like the picture, at least heard the music. The American system was to build up a musical score from many sources with a competent musician to make transitions from one familiar number to another.

I have mentioned the popular form of entertainment in which a young man or a young woman sang a sentimental

132 Edna Purviance and Adolphe Menjou in Charles Chaplin's *Woman of Paris*, 1923

133 The Final Episode in *Morocco*, 1930: Dietrich in the Desert

ballad while magic-lantern slides or dissolving views were exhibited. Possibly this led to the idea that song might also be used as accompaniment to the film. The pianist, in any case, gave way to a small orchestra as the picture houses grew in comfort and also as they raised their price of admission. All of these things are simply developments of the basic idea of supplying an accompaniment to the picture itself. The next step—almost the fatal one for the moving picture—was to provide an independent entertainment of which the moving picture was either an integral part or to which it might become a superfluous appendage.

In America, one name before all others is identified with the presentation of moving pictures, the name of S. L. Rothafel, known as Roxy. So successful were his methods, so magical the name, that you may still find Roxy theatres in the West Indies and in the Far East. He was a showman, and nothing he ever said or did gave the slightest indication that he had any interest in the moving picture whatever—that is, except as an element in entertainment. For a long time I considered him the greatest enemy of the moving picture in America, because in his hands the moving picture was falling back almost to its old position as part of a vaudeville programme. Yet I can see that in a few respects his influence was beneficial.

He began his career as an exhibitor of motion pictures in a converted dance hall in a Pennsylvania mining town; continued in the Middle West; and sometime after he came to New York, he was made managing director of the Strand Theatre in the spring of 1914. The event is important only because the Strand was built in the heart of the theatrical district in New York and was a large and comfortable house designed so that a great majority of patrons could see the screen without the annoying distortions so common in movie-houses which were only converted theatres. To the Strand and later to the Capitol, which was in its time the largest theatre in the country, and then to an enormous auditorium bearing his own name, Roxy brought several definite methods. He insisted on excellent musical accompaniments, bringing in the talented Hugo Riesenfeld to combine the selections from classics and popular music and to conduct the orchestras. He had from his earliest experience in the moving-picture houses an interest in lighting schemes and, according to Mr. Ramsaye, on his first day as an exhibitor Roxy used "a crude switchboard . . . controlling the red,

green and pink lamps that illuminated the screen at the opening and close of the show." But in spite of large theatres and comfortable seats, the moving picture was not yet socially acceptable; you could not raise the price up to the level of theatre prices except for special occasions. Roxy more than anyone else saw that you could create an atmosphere of gentility which even the theatre could not surpass. He dressed the doormen and ushers in smart uniforms—he was once in the Marine Corps of the United States—and he taught them to be snappy and above all to be courteous. Presently the Roxy usher became a figure of fun, but by that time the good work had been done. A woman going into an afternoon show at one of the Roxy theatres was escorted most attentively to a seat after her preference in regard to location had been ascertained, and a semi-military salute was the usher's farewell. In the last flowering of Roxy's ambitions the retiring-rooms for the patrons, the small but well-equipped hospital in the theatre, the general sense of ordered luxury—all available at one-third the price of a fairly bad seat at a successful musical comedy—gave the movie-goer a sense of luxury and above all a sense of the respectability of the moving picture.

But on the stage Roxy had also to have his way. Slowly the wheezy piano gave way to a three-piece orchestra and rapidly the three-piece orchestra grew until few of the endowed symphonic orchestras of the country exceeded the great movie bands in number and few surpassed them in talent. It was absurd to have all these men and to keep them playing merely accompaniments. Soon they were playing an overture before the picture started. The next step was indicated—a vocalist, presently a quartet, and a chorus. After that, dancing, tap dancing, trick dancing and eventually ballet dancing. When all these elements were put together there was no reason why a whole act of an opera should not be produced. There was, in fact, hardly any reason why an entire opera should not be produced if it could be condensed so the patron could see all of it and all of the feature picture without devoting an entire day to the operation. This is exactly what has happened. At the great palaces which remain under the influence of Roxy, there is about an hour of entertainment not connected with the moving picture. This entertainment is excellent technically; the lighting and mechanical effects are usually well managed; in some places the popular types of dancing are beautifully

done. In others the ballet type is directed by pupils or graduates of the Ballet Russe and sometimes produces extraordinary effects. But there is a kind of futility over all this part of the entertainment; it hardly exists for itself—only as part of a show, as if it filled in the time. And on the occasions when good taste is lacking, the general effect is deplorable.

Yet the movies probably needed something of this sort. They got too much of it because Roxy had no sense of limitations. He expanded himself, became a popular radio star, took over the vast job of running the Radio City Music Hall and there ended disastrously. Shortly after this failure, he died. He left firmly implanted the idea of comfort and courtesy for the patron of the movies and of elaboration and superfluity in presenting the pictures. Fortunately most movie-houses were not able to afford his extravagances. For a time, some of the producers who owned a chain of theatres, sent out orchestras, dancers and speciality acts to play these houses, but most of this business also collaped in the great depression of the early 1930's, which may have had no desirable economic effects, but certainly effected a kind of purgation in the arts.

So, after running through various phases, the moving picture is now being shown in decent and respectable surroundings. For the most part it is being shown without elaborate trappings. But there is grave doubt whether the presentation of pictures is altogether as intelligent as it could be. I have referred elsewhere to the seductions practised by exhibitors in double features, and money prizes by which they get people into their houses. Some of these are depression phenomena, some indicate a more intense rivalry on the part of the radio; none is pleasing to the exhibitor who, after all, would be very happy to go back to the standard programme of one newsreel, one feature, and one comedy.

Exhibitors are a hard-headed race and dislike to see patrons leaving their houses with expressions of distaste. They know that if people are not actually pleased with the pictures they have seen and if this happens too many times, the automatic habit of going to the movies will disappear as the automatic habit of going to the theatre has disappeared in all but a very few large cities. If radio did not exist, offering virtually free an extremely varied entertainment, the movies might take a chance on letting their patrons drift into the zone of indifference. Now they cannot.

The exhibitor is the middle man between the public and the producer. It is to him that requests should be made and through him that protests should be forwarded. Nothing could do the moving-picture industry so much good as a continuous demand for return showings of good pictures—just as nothing does the moving picture more harm than silent acceptance of the bad ones. What I wrote of the development of character in the movies has a definite bearing on financial success. Movies based on human characters are like great books which can be read again and again, even if one "knows how the story ends." There are several dozen moving pictures at least which are entitled to virtually permanent showing in a sort of repertory theatre of the classics. In a sense small houses attempt this, but the overwhelming publicity which the producers think they must spend on the latest things they have done kills off the properties which they have already created. Between them the exhibitor who pays less rental for a revival and the public which can get its pleasure from one, ought to do much to keep good pictures alive.

The other point is protest. No producing company will be grateful to me for my insistence upon this, but in the end it will be more profitable to the producers themselves to encourage protest now and avoid boycott later. In connection with censorship the threat of boycott was openly made and the producers listened to an extent. The much graver and more spreading boycott will be totally unofficial and will be practised only by those people who want to go to the movies but have learned that they can have good movies to go to and do not have to support the bad.

12

It is easier to make a long-range prophecy about the future of the movies than to predict the changes of the next few years. Immediately coming is, without doubt, complete production in colour. This is coming not because audiences find black and white pictures unsatisfactory after seeing pictures in colour (as they found silent pictures unsatisfactory after sound came in). Colour is bound to prevail, I believe, because the process can be perfected and if a machine exists, it will be used. Moreover, there is nothing against it, if it is used properly. Properly used, colour should not alter any of the fundamental values of the moving picture.

The most thoughtful of the American experimenters in colour is Robert Edmond Jones, the finest scenic designer in the legitimate theatre. It is Mr. Jones's opinion that colour can be used so dramatically and has such a profound emotional effect that a colour script, so to speak, must be worked out as carefully as a dialogue script. The producers in Hollywood have not yet given Mr. Jones an opportunity to work out his ideas in colour completely, although he was responsible for the very successful short *La Cuccaracha*, which restored technicolour to favour after some very disastrous experiments; his work on *Becky Sharp* was often nullified by the requirements of others engaged in the production. After that, producers with no aesthetic theories decided to make pictures in colour as if they were making them in black and white. In one way this was an excellent theory because it meant that the new pictures would contain the vitality and the speed of movement of the old. In practice it did not work out. The producers flung themselves upon the property which they often call "God's great out-of-doors" and created pictures of appalling dullness and of an extraordinary lustre which first captivated and then tired the eye. One began to suspect that possibly Mr. Jones was right and that colour was so powerful an element that it could not simply be applied slapdash to any picture.

Certainly some subjects lend themselves more gracefully to colour than others do: musical shows and historical romances.

The prediction is made that the movies will soon use the entire repertoire of grand opera, and since this will be excessively tiresome unless the directors are far more inventive than they have been with Shakespeare, colour may be a help. It is rather a pity that an expensive, elaborate and on the whole good production of *Romeo and Juliet* was done without colour; possibly poetic speech and colour will go well together. But the mind shrinks a little from the prospect of another series of gangster pictures done in the rather high and rather unreal colours now prevalent on the screen. The difficulty of making a human face look like a human face and not like a cosmetic palette has not been solved, and while this may be bearable in a romantic fake like *The Garden of Allah*, it does not seem appropriate to James Cagney behind a sub-calibre machine-gun.

The directors who have already used colour have almost all made the error which was made in the beginning with sound. They have used it for its own sake, sacrificing to it action, rhythm and character. The reader who has seen any single film in colour can imagine the difficulties of a quick cut from the interior of an office, to a field of daisies, to a city slum, and to the interior of a silk mill. Such a series of cuts, which might be extremely effective in the development of the plot or the emotions of a picture, was easy to make, with the effect of a series of explosions, in the days of the silent pictures. Sound had complications, but good directors knew how to make their transitions so that they were still effective. Quick changes with colour added will have to be handled with the greatest tact so that the spectator does not see merely a wash or blur of colour. In the end, I believe that the problem will be solved as it was solved with sound. The experiments so far are only moderately promising.

Another development which has constantly threatened, but has not yet reached a stage of public exhibition, is the three-dimensional or stereoscopic photography. There have been a few private exhibitions, in most of which the spectator had to put on a special pair of lenses to get a complete effect of depth in the picture and a high degree of reality, particularly in the human figures. Again, if the thing is well made, it will probably be used. Just as a good director in the silent days never felt the need of speech, but conveyed everything within the limitations and capacities of the silent film, so the skilful camera-man, co-operating with all the other workers on a picture,

can produce a flat film which seems to the spectator to be rounded, three-dimensional and real. We have been accustomed for so long to identify photographs—we do not say "this is a picture of John," we say "this is John"—we have seen so many newsreels of places and people familiar to us that even the fictional movie seems to us to have physical reality. All this means that stereoscopic movies will probably seem to us unnecessary when we first meet them and become a matter of indifference as soon as they are the standard type.

All discussions of future movies are abstract and unreal if they do not consider the interrelation between the moving picture and television. Television at first strikes us as a combination of radio and the movies; a moment's thought makes it clear that, as the movies already use talk, television is actually the projection *of the equivalent of a talking picture* in the home. This becomes even clearer when we know that in experimental programmes now being made in television, ordinary moving pictures are constantly being used—any picture can be scanned and telecast and one system of television is definitely based on the use of film. Even a picture of a football game can be taken, the film so rapidly developed that in a minute or so it can be telecast, and there is also a method of retarding the appropriate noises so that they synchronize. So far as the spectator in his home is concerned, the effect he gets from instant television of a playlet in a studio or of a procession on the street is precisely the effect he would get if a moving picture of the same episode had been taken and transmitted. The solitary difference at the present moment is that a telecast moving picture cannot use colour, and this difference seems to be in favour of the movies; but engineers say with some confidence that it is only a matter of time before television can transmit colour also.

The process by which television will supplant ordinary radio broadcasting is a complicated one both technically and commercially and will take a long time. In the transitional stages, moving pictures will have a great effect on television and in the later stages television will have a great effect on moving pictures.

At the present time the pace of broadcasting (using sound alone) is slow. Except for puns and a few other comic devices, everything sent forth on the air has to establish its reality and meaning in the mind of an auditor who is compelled to do a considerable amount of creative work—to which he is not accustomed. If a hammer is to be used in a dramatic sketch,

to drive a nail into a wall or into the head of a Philistine, the hammer must be mentioned, it must be present in the mind of the listener, it must be felt. If broadcasting is used to drive home argument, again the elements must be established and repeated. The minds of the listeners must be continually helped. The result is that in the familiar dramatic sketches of the radio, a trifling action takes fifteen minutes to develop. This is particularly true of those sketches which carry the fortunes of characters over a long period of time. Whether a man will get a rise in pay, whether a woman's new dress will fit—if the characters themselves have any interest, these tiny questions offer sufficient suspense.

The pace of the moving picture, even though it is not as rapid as it was in the silent days, is much faster. As I noted in connection with the coming of dialogue, pictures run for about an hour and a quarter—the time of five sketches on the air—and in that period they set a multitude of people in action, develop their characters through many small episodes, provide a major incident or two for each of the principals and at the same time carry on a plot at least as complicated as that which serves for several months of broadcasting, and arrive at a climax of action in addition. Movies are, in short, one hundred times as fast as the radio.

The moment television arrives, its dramatic sketches will have to compete with the movies. The spectator will see in his television mirror something which so resembles what he sees on the moving-picture screen that he will unconsciously demand similar effects. It will not be difficult for some elements in radio to make this speed-up. To many workers the opportunity to go directly into action, showing objects instead of describing them, would be an advantage.

And then the process will probably go into reverse. Television will appear in your home and in your home you will not be content to sit for an hour and a quarter intent upon the same subject. The interruptions and distractions, the mere temptation to do something else, will make us a little impatient. Moreover, people hear the radio often without listening. Television will make a far greater demand upon our attention, but for that reason it will have to make it in smaller doses. It will have to change the subject more often. And this means that moving pictures which are to be telecast will have to become more compact than they are now. The movies, now so much

faster than the radio, will have to speed up again to be as fast as a good television programme. This will, I think, first have its effect on pictures which the producers want to make available to the television studios, and ultimately it will have an effect on all movies, because we are not going to be content with a slow-paced picture in the theatre if we have seen a fast one at home. At the present moment movies are slowing down after the excitements of gangster and adventure pictures, and the only well-paced and snappy productions are the unimportant studio jobs which are not derived from the classics. By the time television is a practical entertainment the movies may have snapped out of their present lethargy and become energetic again, or have gone through that cycle and slowed up a second time. The degree of influence of the movies on broadcasting or of television on the movies will, of course, depend on the condition of each when they begin to interact.

There is another way in which one can become entirely vacuous when discussing the movies of the future. That is the way of forgetting that the governments of the world are now aware of the social influence of the pictures. They know that with the movies you can propagandize and persuade and perhaps even more important, you can distract attention away from what is significant and towards all that is trivial. Something more than a natural desire to protect the investments of its own citizens lies behind the effort of every government to cut down the importations of American pictures and to compel the showing of domestic ones. Governments own, or control, or invest in, studios. The desire to please vast numbers of people has resulted in all the banal and all the magnificent pictures we know. What will issue from the desire *not* to please, but to propagandize the people? We have to face the possibility—grim and distant as it may seem—that the moving picture as a form of art will disappear and may even cease to be a form of entertainment.

The foreigner's experience with films made under dictatorship is bound to be limited. Only the most effective of the films are exported and there must be many others intended for domestic approval. We do know that in Russia when raw film was very expensive, most of it was devoted to propaganda pictures, historical or contemporary, and after a few years lighter pictures, certainly not opposed to the Soviet system, but not so urgently propagandist, were made. It is my

understanding that comedies and musical pictures have been made in Germany under the Nazi régime. About Italy I know nothing except that the Government has negotiated for the creation of historical pictures glorifying the Fascist ideal.

If the world is to lose all its liberties, one would say that the loss of the moving picture is a small element in that greater disaster. But one can turn with some comfort to the prediction of the great German art critic, now in exile, Dr. Erwin Panofsky: "If all the lyrical poets, painters and sculptors now living were forced by law to stop writing poetry or producing art, a very small fraction of the general public would become aware of this fact, and a still smaller fraction would seriously regret it. But if the same thing would happen with the movies, there would be the most gruesome of revolutions within a week."

It would be a satisfactory conclusion to many of us if the people of the world would overthrow their dictators in order to protect their movies.

Who actually Makes the Movies

FOLLOWING is a list of the staff associated with producer David O. Selznick in the making of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, with Ronald Colman, Madeleine Carroll, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Mary Astor, C. Aubrey Smith, Raymond Massey and David Niven, under the direction of John Cromwell:

Producer
Director
Assistant Director
Second Assistant Director
Production Manager
Assistant Production Manager
Production Secretary
Location Manager
Script Clerk
Technical adviser and assistant
Art director and 12 sketch artists and draughtsmen
Casting director and three assistants
Property department head and up to 18 on his staff
Set dresser
Company property man
Assistant property man
Cameraman
Second Cameraman
Two Assistant Cameramen
Still cameraman
Company grip and up to 10 assistants
Head set electrician and up to 32 on his staff
Construction superintendent
Construction foreman and up to 225 carpenters, painters, plasterers
Sound mixer
Microphone man
Recorder
Two sound grips
Make-up man and up to 9 assistants
Hairdresser and up to 12 assistants
Costume designer
Wardrobe head and up to 84 on his staff
Men's wardrobe head
Women's wardrobe head
Set wardrobe women
Film Editor and 5 assistants
Transportation department head and up to 11 drivers
Projection machine operator
Advertising and publicity chief and staff of 8
Special effects and up to 7 on staff
Musical director and office staff of 3 and up to 56 musicians
Research department head and staff of 3
Story editor and staff of 5
Assistant to the producer
Accounting department head and staff of 15
Studio police chief and up to 12 staff
Scenario writers, 2

INDEX

(The numerals in italics denote the *figure numbers* of illustrations)

Alexander's Ragtime Band, 109
All Quiet on the Western Front, 73; *114*, *124*
Amos 'n' Andy, 94
Anthony Adverse, 66
Arbuckle, "Fatty," 55, 58; *55*, *68*
Armetta, Henry, 77
Art Films, 98–100; *110*, *111*
Arthur, Jean, *73*
As You Desire Me, *89*
Astaire, Fred, 70, 71, 96, 97; *131*
Avenging Conscience, The, 74

Bara, Theda, 32; *26*, *47*
Barney Oldfield's Race for Life, *53*
Barretts of Wimpole Street, The, *78*
Barry, Iris, 79
Barrymore, John, 91
Bartholomew, Freddie, *79*
Baxter, Warner, 68
Becky Sharp, 109
Ben Hur, 31; *9*
Berlin, Irving, 70
Berman, Pandro, 96
Bernhardt, Sarah, 28; *41*
Big Parade, The, 31, 73, 79
Biograph Pictures, 22; *19*, *20*
Birth of a Nation, The, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 74, 79; *32*
Bitzer, William G., *31*
Black, Alexander, 19
Black Pirate, The, *44*
Blood and Sand, 30; *46*
Blue Angel, The, *92*
Bolero, 73
Boleslavsky, Richard, *105*
Bordertown, 68
Born to Dance, *130*
Borzage, Frank, *10*
Bow, Clara, 33; *48*, *50*
Boyer, Charles, 59
Breton, André, *quoted*, 45
Broadway Bill, 73
Broadway Melody, 31, 92
Brown, Joe E., 69
Bulldog Drummond, 96
Bunny, John, 29; *52*
Butler, Samuel, 59

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The, 99, 100; *110*
Cabiria, 22; *34*
Cagney, James, 50, 52, 65, 67, 69, 110; *2*, *75*
Call It A Day, *14*
Call of the Wild, The, 73
"Camera Angles," 77; *108*, *109*
Camille, 59; *91*, *106*
Cantor, Eddie, 31
Capra, Frank, 73, 93, 96
Cartoons, 45–7
Castle, Irene, *25*
Cavalcade, 31, 73; *11*
Censorship, 54–6
Chaney, Lon, *94*
Chang, 83
Chaplin, Charlie, 7, 13, 27, 29, 30, 31, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 49, 58, 96, 97, 100, 103; *38*, *39*, *59*, *60*, *61*, *62*, *63*, *64*, *132*
Characterisation, 66, 67
Cimarron, 73; *74*
Circus, The, 39
Clair, René, 1, 2, 98
Clansman, The, 24
Clarke, Mae, 50
Cocteau, Jean, 98; *111*
Colbert, Claudette, 97
College, *57*
College Humor, 73
Colour, 110
Comedies, 36, 37; *52–69*
Conklin, Chester, *64*
Coogan, Jackie, *59*
Cooper, Gary, 31, 63, 65, 66; *73*, *96*
Cooper, J. Fenimore, 48
Cooper, Merrian C., 83
Count, The, *62*
Covered Wagon, The, 31, 49
Crawford, Joan, 31, 64; *107*
Cricks and Martin, *24*
Cripple Creek Barroom, *21*
Cromwell, John, *13*
Crowd, The, 73; *4*
Crusades, The, *101*
Cuccaracha, La, 109
Cukor, George, 70, 73; *79*, *106*

Daniels, Bebe, *56*
D'Annunzio, Gabriele, 12, 22; *34*
Daughter of the Gods, A, *121*
David Copperfield, 67, 70, 73; *79*
Davies, Marion, 64
Davis, Bette, 68
De Mille, Cecil B., *101*
Dell, Ethel M., 57
Dickens, Charles, 23, 38, 56, 65, 73, 79
Dietrich, Marlene, 31, 33, 34, 63, 64; *92*, *93*, *133*
Directors, 72–6; *102–7*
Disney, Walt, 6, 19, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 88, 98, 103
Divine Woman, The, *87*
Documentary Film, The, 88; *116–18*
Don Juan, 92
Dressler, Marie, 97
Dubarry, The, 74
Dupont, E., 96

Early Experiments, 17, 18

Edison, Thomas A., 17, 18, 20, 104; *15*, *16*, *21*
Eisenstein, Sergei, 77, 80, 98; *112*, *113*
Eliot, George, 56
English Films, 1, 2, 3
Exploits of Elaine, The, 22

Fairbanks, Douglas, 31, 58; *43*, *44*
Famous Players Company, 28, 29, 30, 97; *42*
Fantomas, 22; *29*
Farewell to Arms, A, 66
Farrell, Charles, *10*
Father's Flirtation, *52*
Fields, W. C., 41, 43, 44, 67, 96, 97; *66*, *79*
First National Pictures, 91, 92
Fitzgerald, Scott, 32
Flaherty, Robert, 83, 88; *116*, *117*, *118*
Fleet's In, The, *48*
Flight of a Tartar Tribe, 83
Floorwalker, The, *60*
Folies Bergères, *127*
Fonda, Henry, *76*
Fool There Was, A, 32; *26*
Footlight Parade, *129*
Ford, John, 67, 73, 96; *100*, *103*
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, The, 30, 31; *45*
Fox Pictures, 89, 90, 91, 92; *121*, *126*
Francis, Kay, *13*
Franck, César, 104
Fury, The, 51
Future of the Movies, the, 109–14

Gable, Clark, 31, 66, 97; *99*
Garbo, Greta, 13, 31, 33, 59, 97; *86*, *88*, *89*, *90*, *91*, *105*, *106*
Gangster Films, 49–53; *75*, *77*
Garden of Allah, The, 110
Gay Desperado, The, 71
Gaynor, Janet, 31; *10*
Gerard, Ambassador, 90
Ghost Goes West, The, 2
Girl of the Paris Streets, A, *30*
Gish, Lilian, 25, 26; *37*
Glyn, Elinor, 32, 33; *50*
Gold Rush, The, 40, 41; *63*
Goldwyn. *See* Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Good Little Devil, A, 28
Grand Hotel, 31, 97; *5*
Grass, 83
Great Guy, The, *2*
Great Train Robbery, The, 21, 24, 49
Great Ziegfeld, The, 70; *12*
Griffith, D. W., 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 36, 48, 68, 73, 74, 79, 81, 96, 98; *31*, *32*, *33*, *35*, *36*, *37*, *38*
Grosz, George, 99

Hackett, James K., 28
Hall, James, *48*
Hallelujah, 82
Hamlet, 76
Hanson, Lars, *87*
Harlow, Jean, 59; *85*
Harron, Robert, 26; *30*
Hart, William S., 48, 58, 65; *40*, *70*
Hathaway, Henry, 73
Haver, Phyllis, *54*
Hays, Will, 34, 55, 56
Henry VIII, 2, 21
Hepburn, Katherine, 96; *100*
Herbert, Hugh, 70
Hitler, Adolf, 87
Hollywood, 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 22, 27, 34, 42, 50, 51, 52, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 67, 69, 70, 71, 81, 82, 88, 91, 97, 99, 109; *4*, *84*
Hoopla, 73
Hotel Imperial, *122*

I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang, 52
Ince, Thomas H., 48, 96; *38*
Informer, The, 67, 73
Intolerance, 22, 23, 24, 73, 74, 79; *33*, *35*
Iron Horse, The, *103*
Irwin, May, *23*
"It," 32, 33
It Happened One Night, 73
It's a Gift, *66*

Jannings, Emil, 97; *81*, *109*
Jazz Singer, The, 31, 92
Jolson, Al, 31
Jones, Robert Edmond, 109
Judex, 22

Karno's "Humming Birds," 29
Keaton, Buster, 42, 48, 58, 100; *67*
Kennedy, Edgar, *55*
Keystone, Comedies, 29, 36, 37, 39, 41, 46, 58; *55*, *58*, *69*
Kid, The, *59*
Korda, Alexander, 1, 2, 98
Krauss, Werner, 99
Krazy Kat, 46
Kuhn, Edmund, *22*

Laemmle, Carl, 20
Lang, Fritz, 51; *76*
Lasky, Jesse L., *40*
Last Laugh, The, *109*
Laughton, Charles, 58, 59, 67; *78*, *99*, *115*
Le Baron, William, 96
Le Sang d'un Poète, 98; *111*
Lenin, 12
Les Misérables, *115*
Lejeune, Miss C. A., 2, *quoted*, 100
Lights of New York, 94
Litigation, in early days, 20
Little Caesar, 52, 65
Little Women, 56
Lives of a Bengal Lancer, The, 66, 73
Lloyd, Frank, 73; *11*, *99*, *125*
Lloyd, Harold, 31, 42, 43, 48, 58, 100; *56*, *65*
Lockwood, Harold, *42*
Loew, Marcus, 89
Lombard, Carole, 60, 64
Lorenz, Pare, 88
Lost Horizon, The, 70, 93
Lost Patrol, The, 73

Love, *88*
Loves of Jeanne Ney, The, *108*
Loy, Myrna, 50, 67; *97*, *98*
Lubitsch, Ernst, 21, 33, 74, 96; *81*, *102*
Lumière Brothers, 17, 18

Macbeth, 76
McCoy, Tim, 73
McHugh, Frank, 70
McLaglen, Victor, 67
Magic Lantern, The, 19, 20
Mamoulian, Reuben, 74
Man of Aran, *118*
March, Frederic, 66
March of Time, The, 86, 88
Marsh, Mae, 26, 28; *30*
Marx Brothers, The, 13, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 71, 100; *67*
Mary of Scotland, 66; *100*
Meissonier, 16
Méliès, Georges, 17, 18; *17*, *18*
Menjou, Adolphe, *132*
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 67, 89, 91, 96; *7*
Mickey Mouse, 43, 46, 47, 51
Midsummer Night's Dream, A, 69; *80*
Milestone, Lewis, 73; *107*, *114*
Mr. Deeds Goes to Town, 66, 70
Mix, Tom, *72*, *84*
Moana, *116*
Modern Times, 38, 39, 40; *64*
"Montage," 78, 79
Moore, Owen, *89*
Moreno, Antonio, *50*
Morocco, *133*
Motion Pictures Almanac, 30
Movietone City, *8*, *126*
Muni, Paul, 67; *77*
Murnau, F. W., 96; *109*
Murray, Mae, *71*
Mutiny on the Bounty, 73; *99*, *125*
Mutual Film Company, 24, 30
Muybridge, Edward, 16
My Four Years in Germany, 90
My Man Godfrey, 70

Nanook of the North, 83; *117*
Nazimova, Alla, 97
Negri, Pola, 33; *122*
Never Weaken, *65*
Newspaper influence, 21
News-reels, 86, 87; *119*, *120*
Niblo, Fred, *9*
Nickelodeons, 21
Night at the Opera, A, 45; *67*
Normand, Mabel, *53*, *68*
Not so Dumb, 73

Oberon, Merle, 67
October, see *Ten Days that Shook the World*
Of Human Bondage, 68
Origins of the Movies, 16, 17
Orphans of the Storm, *36*
O'Sullivan, Maureen, *78*
Our Daily Bread, 73

Pabst, G. W., *108*
Painted Veil, The, *105*
Panofsky, Dr. Erwin, *quoted*, 114
Paramount Pictures, 34, 55, 89, 90, 91, 92
Paris in Spring, 73
Passport to Hell, A, 73
Pater, Walter, 73
Pathé, 103
Patriot, The, *81*
Patsy, The, 73
Pawnshop, The, *61*
Perils of Pauline, The, 22; *27*
Picasso, *quoted*, 83
Pickford, Mary, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 58; *40*, *42*
Plainsman, The, *73*
Plough That Broke the Plains, The, 88
Pollard, Snub, *56*
Pollyanna Books, 57
Potemkin, 80; *113*
Powell, Eleanor, *130*
Powell, William, *98*
Propaganda in the Movies, 84, 85
Public Enemy, The, 50, 65, 73; *75*
Pudovkin, 77, 80
Purviance, Edna, *132*

Queen Christina, 74; *90*
Queen Elizabeth, 28; *41*
Quincey, Thomas de, 83

Radio City Music Hall, 107
Rain, *107*
Rainer, Louise, 71
Ramsaye, Terry, 20, 22, 32, 105
Rasp, Fritz, *108*
Real Estate Operations, 90
Reinhardt, Max, 69; *80*
Rice, John C., *23*
Riesenfeld, Hugo, 105
Rin-Tin-Tin, 58, 91; *82*
Roberta, 70
Robinson, Edward G., 52, 65, 67
Rockabye, 73
Rogers, Ginger, *131*
Roland, Ruth, *28*
Romeo and Juliet, 68, 70, 103, 110; *95*
Roosevelt, President, 51, 85
Roosevelt, Theodore, 49
Rose Marie, 73
Rotha, Paul, 88
Rothafel, S. L. *See* Roxy
Roxy, 105, 106, 107

Sadie Thompson, *123*
Salome, *47*
Salvation Hunters, The, 95
Scarface, 77
Schoedsack, Ernest, 83
Seastrom, Victor, *87*
Sennett, Mack, 36, 37, 43; *38*, *53*, *54*, *68*
Serials, 22; *27*, *29*
Seventh Heaven, *10*
"Sex Appeal," 32–5; *47–51*
Shakespeare, 56, 69, 110
She Done Him Wrong, *51*
Shearer, Norma, 31, 64, 96; *78*, *94*, *95*

Sheik, The, 30
Show People, 73
Sidney, Sylvia, *76*
Silly Symphonies series, 43, 46
Singing Fool, The, 31
So Red the Rose, 73
Song of Songs, The, 34
Soviet Cinema, influence of, 79–81; *112–14*
Stars in private life, 58–64; *84*
Steamboat Round the Bend, The, 73
Steiner, Ralph, 88
Stereoscopic Photography, 110
Sterling, Ford, *55*
Sternberg, Joseph von, 95
Stiller, Moritz, *122*
Stone, Lewis, *81*
Street Scene, 73
Stroheim, Eric von, 96; *89*
Sudermann, Hermann, 34
Sunny Side Up, 31
Swain, Mack, *58*
Swanson, Gloria, 33; *58*, *69*, *123*

Talkies, coming of the, 91–3
Tatters; a Tale of the Slums, *24*
Taylor, Robert, 59; *91*, *107*
Television, 111–13
Temple, Shirley, 10, 63, 68; *83*
Ten Days That Shook the World, 80; *112*
Tess of the Storm Country, *42*
Thackeray, W. M., 56
Thalberg, Irving, 96
Thin Man, The, 67, 73; *98*
Three Little Pigs, The, 47, 88
Tillie's Punctured Romance, 29, 103
Tolstoy, 12
Tony Runs Wild, *72*
Tower of Lies, The, *94*
Tracy, Spencer, 68
Trader Horn, 2
Trail of the Lonesome Pine, The, 73
Trotsky, Leon, 84
Trouble in Paradise, 74
Turpin, Ben, *54*
Twentieth Century Fox Studios, *8*

Universal Pictures, 91

Valentino, Rudolph, 30; *45*, *46*
Van Dyke, W. S., 67, 73, 75, 96; *28*
Vanity Fair, 103
Veidt, Conrad, 99; *110*
Vengeance is Mine, *25*
Vice Squad, The, *13*
Victorian Classics, the, 56, 57; *78*, *79*
Vidor, King, 73, 82, 96
Virginian, The, 49
Vitagraph Pictures, 103
Voyage à travers l'Impossible, *18*

Walsh, Raoul, *104*
Walthall, Henry, 26
Warner Brothers, 50, 90, 91, 92, 94
Wash Day Troubles, *22*
Way Down East, *31*, *37*
Way of All Flesh, The, 59
Wellman, William A., 73, 96
Wells, H. G., 2, 3
West, Mae, 31, 32, 34, 35, 50, 55, 56, 68, 96; *49*, *51*
"Westerns," 27, 48, 49; *70–4*
What Price Glory? *104*
What Price Hollywood? 73
Where Did You Get That Hat? 104
White Eagle, The, *28*
White, Pearl, *27*
Whoopee, *128*
Wiene, Robert, *110*
Wister, Owen, 49
Woman of Paris, A, 96; *39*, *132*

You Only Live Once, *76*
Young, Roland, 67

Zanuck, Darryl, 50, 54
Zukor, Adolph, 28, 30, 92

The mov